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Ritual and pedagogy : Teachers' use of ritual in pre-primary classroom settings

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Ritual and Pedagogy:
Teachers' Use of Ritual in Pre-Primary Classroom Settings

by
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ABSTRACT

Pre-primary teachers' daily organisation and routines are established through repetitive patterns of actions which become highly ritualised. This study examines how pre-primary teachers use ritual and how ritual structures teaching in pre-primary classroom settings and in doing so serves a pedagogical purpose for teachers. Describing forms and functions of ritual provides a way of examining and interpreting what teachers know and do and how they go about their work.

The interpretive paradigm of qualitative methodology has been adopted for the study. Participant observation and structured interviews are used as the primary methods of conducting field work and collecting data. The research is designed in the form of three case studies. Each case focuses on the teacher within the context of an interactive pre-primary classroom. Two classrooms are situated within the state education system, whilst the third setting is a Montessori pre-school. Data are reported for each of the cases.

Six key features of ritual as it is enacted in pre-primary settings emerged from the data. Findings indicate that: pre-primary classrooms are highly ritualised; rituals are taken for granted; some rituals are sacrosanct; rituals can act as a framework; rituals are an expression of values and beliefs; and rituals are didactic. Classroom ritual has the potential to act as a tool through which teachers structure a particular form of praxis which goes beyond surface meaning and which carries a rational, pedagogical purpose for teachers. Ritual in each of the three pre-primary settings went beyond the realm of conveying messages of conformity, consensus and cohesiveness and was a means of putting in place a particular instructional form and teaching procedure for each of the three teachers.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text: or

(iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature: 

Date: 15 th December 1997.

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The greatest debt of gratitude I owe to the three teachers involved in this study who unfortunately cannot be named . To 'Helen', 'Jean' and 'Diane' I wish to convey my sincere appreciation for their unselfish sharing of valuable time and more importantly, of their inner thoughts and feelings, and my admiration of the risk they took in allowing me to be part of their classrooms and in opening up their hearts to an outsider. I felt welcomed and 'at home' in each of the settings, and for this I am indebted to each of them.

I am also grateful to my thesis committee, the Chair of which, Professor Max Angus has been a guide and support, setting challenges, formulating ideas, and helping me make decisions. Thanks also go to the other members of the committee, Associate Professor Len King, and Dr Glenda Campbell-Evans for their continued interest and support and valuable feedback.

Last but not least a special thanks to my family and friends who lived through the ritual of writing a thesis and who continued to rally around and to encourage me when the task seemed over-whelming.

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

24 October, 1994: Radford Pre-Primary Centre.

This particular day began no differently from the many other days I had spent at Radford Pre-Primary Centre. As I arrived for observations, parents were already setting down their children, making their way up the steps and through the side gate. The children were as happy as always, pushing their way past mum to arrive first, calling their friends, greeting each other and entering the classroom to begin the usual morning proceedings. As I entered the classroom, scanning the lively scene for Helen, the classroom teacher, I noticed a young girl of about fifteen years of age present in the centre. She was standing to the side reticently watching the children's arrival and their involvement in the various activities around the centre. Amidst the commotion Helen emerged and drew me over to introduce Vanessa, a local high school student who was to attend the centre for the next two weeks as part of her high school work experience program. Vanessa was at the critical stage of deciding which career path she should take. She was considering early childhood teaching as a serious option and had chosen Radford Pre-Primary as her work experience location. As Helen slipped away into the sea of activity we commented casually about the appealing environment, the display of children's work, and how captivating the children were. Our interaction, however, was promptly broken with children approaching and asking for our attention and assistance.

Soon Vanessa was sitting at a table engrossed in a one-to-one discussion, helping a child with a puzzle.

As the parents departed and the children gathered on the mat, Vanessa and I sat side by side on small chairs at the edge of the mat and watched Helen as she began her usual Monday morning mat session. The roll call was conducted to determine attendance and the children were greeted and settled. "Children this morning Mrs Maloney is with us again. Let's welcome Mrs Maloney." The children responded with the usual spontaneous clapping. "Today we also have another visitor. Miss Jenkins will be with us for two weeks. She would like to be a teacher, and so she is working with us for two weeks to see what Radford Pre-Primary children can do. And there is something special about Miss Jenkins, when she was your age, just five years old, she was sitting where you are, on this mat. Yes, she came to Radford Pre-Primary when she was a little girl, which is quite a long time ago now!".

Helen continued with her task of introducing the new topic for the week. For several weeks she had taken the children on a journey around the world by addressing a number of countries through her theme work. The theme for this week was, 'Italy'. Helen launched into the topic, with what I had come to recognise as her planned format. She told the children a story about the country called Italy. They located the country on a map and examined the flag, identifying the colours and the pattern. Helen talked about the physical features of the country. The key tourist attractions were pointed out; the important buildings; a brief, simplified history and the main cultural features were explained. The traditional food, customs and habits of the people were also discussed. The most impressive point for Helen and the children, was the shape of the country and the location of the small island at the southern tip of the mainland. This feature was highlighted and emphasised, culminating in Helen presenting this information as, "Long-legged Italy kicked poor Sicily into the Mediterranean Sea".

Throughout the presentation Vanessa had remained seated quietly beside me, absorbed in what she heard and what she saw, while I was engrossed as usual with my notebook on my knee. With the announcement of the rhyme about 'long legged Italy', Vanessa turned to me and with eyes wide and a look of complete astonishment on her face said, "I can remember ALL of this!" The memories had come rushing back to her, stimulated by the rhyme about 'long-legged Italy'.

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For Helen, teaching has not altered significantly in the ten years since Vanessa attended Radford. Indeed, Helen has gone about her daily routine of presenting content at Radford, largely unchanged over the twenty years she has been teaching at this school. In this time, she has developed and maintained a format, a style of presentation and curriculum which have become her trademark. She has orchestrated life in her classroom according to a personal conceptual schema, her personal view of the world, the social and cultural meaning she holds and her values, beliefs and understandings of what is 'good' pre-primary teaching. Her patterns of behaviours, interactions and classroom practices have become a way of expressing this view and have over time become highly ritualised. From one perspective, Helen's practice may be considered 'habit', to the extent that her teaching is repetitive, mundane and automatic. Yet, from another prespective her practice may be regarded as a set of significant actions, carefully planned to provide profound experiences for her students.

Background to the Study

Pre-primary classroom contexts contrast markedly from both primary and secondary classrooms in organisation and structure of the environment, types of programs presented, role of the teacher and staffing requirements. Thus the pre-primary classroom setting (designed for children in their fifth year) provides an interesting field for investigating the pedagogy of teachers.

My thirty years of involvement in early childhood education has contributed to a personal view of what pre-primary classrooms should look like. On the surface pre-primary centres have a sense of commonality about them. They look the same, in that, children appear to be engaged in similar types of learning experiences, the physical layout is comparable and the teachers seem to have a common purpose tied to a strong history of traditions and deeply held beliefs which stem from a shared philosophical base. Pre-primary teachers establish routines and procedures which are quite distinctive and universal. Classrooms catering for five-year olds that I have observed, in Italy, Singapore, and the United States of America, have patterns of operation and traditional events that have much in common; such as activity time, story telling, circle time and snack time. There are very few variations in the way teachers structure timetables and events.

At one level the commonality is paradoxical. In Western Australia, for example, the curriculum content of pre-primary programs is much less clearly defined than in the primary and secondary sectors. A codified set of content, whether in discrete subject areas, or in other forms, does not exist specifically for pre-primary teachers. Attempts have been made in the past to address the area of pre-primary in some syllabus documents, but these have been both tenuous and superficial. Generally, pre-primary teachers make personal decisions about what is important to teach and what knowledge is

worth knowing. In many cases, decisions of this kind are influenced by what the year one teacher determines is essential for beginning formal schooling. It would seem therefore, that the commonality is due less to administrative policy than to a common culture.

The informal nature of pre-primary programs and settings and the focus on play as a central mode of young children's learning, seem to give the pre-primary teachers' day to day classroom activities the appearance of consistency and uniformity and of effortless organisation and routine. The elements which propagate sameness and uniformity in these settings are attributed to patterns of behaviour, interactions and practices constructed and orchestrated by the teacher and which over time have become ritualised. That is, they have become more or less invariant performances (Rappaport, 1989) and a form of communication through their symbols and gestures. Investigating ritual and pedagogy, requires the researcher to look beyond the common surface features; the automatic, ordered patterns of surface action, to the ways teachers work within and around certain activities in order to create personal systems and meanings.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the interplay between ritual and pedagogy. It seeks to examine the forms and functions of ritual, those activities performed by teachers in their day to day teaching that have the qualities described by Grimes (1990) as repetitive, patterned, traditional, highly valued, and symbolic. The study explores the role of ritual in structuring teaching in pre-primary classrooms and the extent to which ritual serves a pedagogical purpose for teachers. It is an ethnographic study, an interpretive inquiry into how three pre-primary teachers use aspects of ritual as a way of defining what they value, know and do.

The study seeks answers to the questions:

- how do pre-primary teachers use ritual
- what are the forms and functions of ritual
- to what extent do rituals serve a pedagogical purpose and
- how do pre-primary teachers vary ritual to achieve particular intentions and outcomes?

As rituals are part of the everyday life in the classroom and are constructed by the teacher in interaction with students, it seems that ritual may be a worthwhile lens through which to examine the pedagogy of pre-primary teachers. Applying the concept of ritual to classroom life provides a way of examining classroom practice and understanding the teachers' ideology, beliefs and personal practical knowledge within the context of the classroom.

I contend that describing and interpreting teaching in pre-primary classroom settings from the perspective of ritual performance will provide a strong basis for, understanding how teachers express themselves, how they achieve their goals and what teaching is about. The extent to which ritual is merely, a mindless unspecified activity for the teacher, a way of filling in the day, or alternatively a sophisticated means by which the teacher codifies pedagogical knowledge and then systematically translates intentions is explored in this study. Ritual may enable the teacher to work within a framework that supports a pedagogy that is systematic though superficial. On the other hand, the framework may act as a profound experience for the teacher thereby defining what is pedagogically possible and educationally sound.

Overview of the Study

Investigating the extent to which ritual serves a pedagogical purpose in pre-primary classroom settings is approached through case studies of three pre-primary teachers, who for the purpose of this study, I have called Helen (Radford Pre-Primary), Jean (Swanleigh Montessori School), and Diane (Connor Pre-Primary). Both Radford and Connor Pre-Primaries are attached to local primary schools and are under the administration of the school principal and controlled by the state education department. Swanleigh is a privately owned and managed preschool which functions according to the philosophy and pedagogy of Maria Montessori. I chose to include an alternative school in the study, as a way of making the familiar strange (Geertz, 1973).

My personal involvement in the area of pre-primary education and with the state education system, spans thirty years. I began my teaching career in a small country school and continued to work with young children in various city schools for ten years. I then joined a tertiary teacher training institution where my initial role was to assist in preparing student teachers for placement on their profesional field experience. Contact with the field of early childhood was maintained through school visits and subsequent liaison with both state and private school systems. In more recent years I have been engaged in early childhood teacher education with a particular interest in the curriculum and pedagogy of pre-primary teachers.

Given my professional experience, I was keen to maintain a critical and analytical perspective rather than develop what Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) describe as a "cosy mental attitude" (p. 102). The danger of this condition is for events and their significance to escape the observer, as he or she becomes engrossed in the setting or the moment. I anticipated that the strangeness of Swanleigh would stir me into asking pertinent questions about the other two settings and to look at the familiar in new ways.

This thesis has been organised as follows. In Chapter One I have attempted to provide an overview of the study, describing the background and purpose of the investigation. In Chapter Two, I explore the concept of ritual and the problems associated with defining ritual. Literature pertaining to ritual and education and ritual and teaching is also presented and I make links between ritual and teacher's personal practical knowledge. Other literature is reviewed in context and can be found in Chapter Three (Conceptual Framework), Chapter Four (Methodology), and Chapter Five (Educational Context). Following the discussion of ritual, Chapter Three defines the conceptual framework of the study as a way of structuring the theoretical perspectives underlying the study. In Chapter Four, methodological concerns are explored and I explain the ethnographic procedures used to describe, interpret and explain the every day events of the three classrooms. Chapter Five focuses on an explanation of the educational contexts of the three schools in order that the reader be provided with some background on the historical, social, cultural and educational development of each of the schools. The schools' philosophical foundations strongly influence teachers' decisions and actions and form a basis for classroom norms and values. In Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, I describe the case studies of three teachers. Each case focuses on the teacher's behaviours and actions within the context of the classroom. A typical day in each setting is described with particular attention to the rituals used by teachers in pre-primary classroom settings. A more analytical approach is taken in Chapter Nine with a discussion of how rituals compare and contrast across the three settings. This chapter further explores the role of ritual, in particular the forms, function and content of ritual. In Chapter Ten, I draw conclusions regarding ritual and pre-primary schooling and the relationship between ritual and pedagogy. Implications are drawn for teaching and teacher education.

Definition of Terms

Pre-primary: A year of non-compulsory schooling in which the children turn five years of age (January to December). Formal schooling in Western Australia begins in the year the child turns six years of age (January to December).

The pre-primary year may be sessional (four half-day sessions a week) or full-day (four full days a week) with one day designated as a non-contact day for preparation and planning for the teacher. At present a full-day session for five year olds is being phased in by the Education Department of Western Australia, for all pre-primary centres. At the time of this study, Radford was operating a full-day program, whilst Connor operated a sessional program. Swanleigh offered parents a choice of sessional or full-day program, with an accompanying fee structure.

Pre-primary centre: Each centre has one teacher and a full-time teacher assistant. There are approximately 27 children to each centre. Pre-primary centres are part of the local primary school system and consequently come under the control of the state education system and are administered and financed by the Education Department of Western Australia. In most cases, pre-primary centres are located on the primary school campus, however, in some cases they may be off-site, some distance from the primary school.

Early childhood education: Early childhood education is a generic term and refers to a variety of programs for children between birth and eight years of age. In this study, early childhood education specifically refers to the early years of schooling, namely children from three years to eight years.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS RITUAL?

Introduction

Ritual is a complex and multi-faceted concept. Whilst interest in ritual has a long history with anthropologists, sociologists and theologists, educators have turned their attention to ritual only in more recent times and therefore it remains largely unexplored, particularly in the field of early childhood education. In this chapter I examine the literature in order to situate ritual within a cultural context, to explore a range of definitions of ritual and to consider how ritual can be construed in educational settings. Several definitions of ritual are put forward, followed by an examination of the literature on ritual in education and finally links are make between ritual and pedagogy.

Defining Culture

Ritual and culture are related constructs that have been variously defined in the social sciences. Rituals can be constructed as cultural practices, but what does this mean? The definition of ritual is contingent upon a prior definition of culture.

In providing a comprehensive outline of the concept of culture, Thompson (1990) distinguishes between four basic usages of the term 'culture' which include, the "classical conception, descriptive conception, symbolic conception and structural conception" (p. 123). The 'symbolic conception' discussed by Thompson, has been central to the anthropological debates in the work of Clifford Geertz. As my focus in this study is to explore the meanings and messages of rituals in classroom settings, then a view of culture from the perspective of actions, symbols, signs and their interpretation is implicit in my approach. According to Thompson (1990) the symbolic conception of culture may be broadly characterised as "the pattern of meaning embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with each other and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs" (p. 132). From this perspective, cultural analysis may be regarded as making sense of the actions, expressions and forms which constitute social life.

Defining Ritual

Given the various meanings attributed by social scientists to culture, it is not surprising that differing definitions of ritual exist. The literature highlights the multi-dimensional aspects of ritual and includes descriptions of ritual as:

- a pattern of action (Jennings, 1982)
- a form of communication through signs, symbols and gestures (Harris, 1992; Turner 1969)
- a means of maintaining social order (McLaren, 1986; Bernstein et al., 1966)
- being responsible for enacting meaning through concrete patterned activity or action (Geertz, 1973)
- a means of sustaining, transmitting and internalising societal and cultural ideologies (Geertz, 1973; Henry, 1992).

These definitions are derived from the theoretical perspectives of their authors; functionalism, structural functionalism, structuralism and cultural symbolism to name several. For example, ritual is examined as; having intellectual functions (Jennings, 1982); a performance (Rappaport, 1989); a structural system (Turner, 1969); and a cultural context (Geertz, 1973; Henry, 1992),

Jennings (1982) defines ritual as a symbolic structure. He suggests that ritual performs intellectual functions in ways peculiar to itself. His view is that ritual is not a senseless activity but is one way in which human beings make sense of their world and discover who they are in the world. Jennings suggests that within the same ritual performance repeated in the same cultural settings, variations do exist and it is this variation which enables ritual to be regarded as a mode of inquiry. When there is no variation, Jennings claims there can only be transmission and illustration of knowledge gained elsewhere.

According to Grimes (1982) ritualisation occurs through stylised, repeated gesturing and posturing and the "rhythms and structures arise on their own, they flow with or without our conscious assent" (p. 36). This view maintains that ritual is both an implicit and explicit part of everyday life and carries both an overt and covert function for the performer and the participants (Henry, 1992).

Rappaport's (1989) definition of ritual "as the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances" (p. 467) also suggests that there are two levels at work in the messages being transmitted by the ritual performance. Firstly, at the overt level is the performance itself, or technical production. Here the messages transmitted through the invariant order of the ritual are those that we see, hear and perform. Secondly, at the covert level are the messages carried by the deeper formation

of meaning as indicated through the variations, signs and symbols included in the ritual performance. It is the ritual signs and symbols which carry the meaning. A sign gives a clear unambiguous message, whilst the symbols are more complex in that they are packed with meaning and are related by convention to that which they signify (Rappaport, 1989). The symbolic, however, is not always logical and clear. It carries multiple meanings and usually appeals to our minds, emotions, desires and feelings (Harris, 1992). Turner (1967) argued that symbols are efficient carriers of social values and within the context of ritual, the symbol's meaning is directed to certain ends. The performance of the ritual and the meaning it carries are not easily segregated in practice, although it is possible for a participant to go through the ritual motions and not be affected by the symbolic meaning (Henry, 1992).

One approach used to analyse ritual is that put forward by Turner (1969). Turner sees society as more than "a system of social positions" (p. 131) and ritual as more than a method of social control. Turner speculates that there are two states of being in the world. These he termed "structure" and "anti-structure". In the first state, the emphasis is on order, which is concerned mainly with status, position and rank, and the expectations associated with these form society's point of view. The state of "anti-structure" exists when people step over the threshold into a "liminal" state. Turner argues, liminality is a process in which people are removed temporarily from the social structure, are maintained by power and order and come to enjoy an intense comradeship and communion. Turner (1969) tells us that

> It is as though there are here two major "models" for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less." The second, which emerges recognisably in

> the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus,* community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elder. (p. 96)

Turner's distinction between structure and anti-structure is very useful in acting as a tool for analysing a ritual's meaning. Structure denotes order, organisation and routine, and may not appear attractive. Anti-structure means that there is a wide variety of ways that the system can be arranged (McLaren, 1986). Turner (1980) cited in McLaren (1986) is critical of the 'flat view' of ritual which refers to ritual as mere reflections of aspects or components of the social structure. He attributes ritual with a 'model for' function and claims that ritual can anticipate, and generate change.

According to Harris (1992), ritual pervades society and culture and society's values and norms are expressed and transmitted through ritual. In its simplest form, a ritual is an uncontested pattern of behaviour which has symbolic meaning for participants. Ritual goes beyond the surface meaning and is symbolic of a particular world view (Henry, 1992).

Rituals constitute the major symbolic networks, cultural contexts and ideological domains through which attempts are made to regulate social life. Friedrich (1966), whilst acknowledging the difficulties with a generic definition of ritual, provides the following explanation which summarises the key concepts:

> I have taken ritual to mean sets of repetitive and culturally specific ceremonies or performances... ritual and ideology are parts or dimensions of culture which can be thought of as the expression or

articulation of the deeper-lying values, attitudes, ideas, and sentiments of the individuals in a community. (p.192)

According to Friedrich (1966) ritual shapes and forms the culture which makes up our social lives. It advances systems of meaning, attitudes, values and norms which sustain the cultural social order.

Ritual permeates society and from an anthropological viewpoint, society's values and norms are expressed and transmitted through ritual (Harris, 1992). According to Turner (1976), "ritual is part of a society's communication code for transmitting messages to one another about matters of ultimate concern and about those entities believed to have enunciated, clarified and mediated a culture's bonding axons to its present members" (p.504). In this way, ritual sustains patterns of behaviour whilst communicating and shaping a particular set of ideas for those who participate in them and observe them.

Defining Pedagogy

In general terms, pedagogy refers to the systematised learning or instruction dealing with aims, principles and methods of teaching. Leinhardt and Greeno (1986) propose that skilled teachers possess a complex set of schemata for teaching and that skill in teaching rests on two fundamental premises; what is to be taught, and how it will be taught. The authors add, that a characteristic of skilled teaching is that many component actions are performed with little effort because they have become automatic through practice. Many teachers, therefore, possess large repertoires of teaching actions which they perform fluently.

Teachers draw on general pedagogical knowledge, that is, a body of knowledge, beliefs and skills about teaching in order to facilitate understanding for students. It cannot

be assumed that students will understand merely from teachers imparting information. Rather, teachers construct, refine, and select appropriate means to facilitate the learning for students. As reported by Wineburg and Wilson (1988) teachers need to first have a thorough comprehension of the key ideas, concepts and interpretations of content to be taught and second be able to put themselves into the minds of students to understand their needs, motivations and abilities as learners. It is the ability to successfully and effectively merge these two dimensions which constitutes good teaching.

Strategies for teaching refer to the various approaches teachers use interactively in the classroom to accomplish their objectives and are a part of the ways in which teachers organise and manage instruction (Williams and Fromberg 1992). Early childhood educators select strategies based on their beliefs about how young children develop and learn, as well as what is valuable about what and how learning takes place. More recent debate about how young children might best be taught has revolved around the definition of 'developmentally appropriate' practice (Bredekamp 1987). However to ensure developmentally appropriate practice good teachers must also understand individual children's strengths, needs and interests and ways of adapting curriculum and teaching. Eisner (1982) observes in his studies that what children learn has a great deal to do with what teachers believe about learning and the way in which those beliefs are reflected in the learning activities offered.

Qualities of Ritual

According to Grimes (1990) the key aspects of ritual include performance, enactment and other overt forms of gestural activity. Grimes likens the "search for an adequate definition of ritual with the search for the holy grail" (p. 12) and suggests that a helpful way to get at the nature of ritual is to identify its family characteristics. Grimes

views ritual as a quality rather than a concrete thing and therefore refers to a list of qualities as indicators that begin to appear when action becomes ritualised. These qualities listed by Grimes (1990, p. 14) include: enacted, formalised, stylised, repetitive, rhythmic, collective, institutionalised, patterned, invariant, traditional, highly valued, multi-layered, symbolic, perfected, dramatic, mystical, adaptive, functional and conscious. When an activity becomes dense with certain qualities then it becomes increasingly proper to refer to it as ritualised.

In terms of the theory of ritual, Gerholm (1988) cited in Henry (1992) identifies a number of pertinent features of ritual which are particularly useful and which allows for the contemporary, multi-faceted nature of society with its various cultures to be considered:

- ritual is embedded in a social context, and therefore this will affect an individual's experience of it
- ritual serves to orient people to certain traditions which are then updated to serve current needs
- ritual is multi-dimensional and therefore may be examined or approached from multiple perspectives
- those participating in the ritual take an individual perspective on meaning.

There may be a correct way of performing the ritual, but there is no common experience for all.

As previously stated, evidence in the literature indicates that the term "ritual" has become extremely difficult to define. It provokes a range of explanations particularly between those put forward by scholars of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and theology and those of more secular explanations. The term denotes meanings which range from boring, mindless routine, such as cleaning one's teeth, whereas for others it could represent a profound experience such as a wedding or a funeral.

In this study my approach to ritual is to take Friedrich's (1966) definition outlined above, as a framework for understanding ritual in the classroom setting. Ritual, therefore, is taken to mean the sets of 'repetitive and culturally specific ceremonies or performances' and ritual and ideology are part of the culture and are considered as 'the expression or articulation of the deeper-lying values, attitudes, ideas and sentiments of the individuals'. In this way I seek to make sense of the extent to which ritual and pedagogy (sets of action) are interconnected and the forms and functions of ritual (the deeper expressions of meaning) are examined as a way of defining what teachers value, know and do.

Studies of Ritual in Education

School and classroom communities are intricately structured with evidence of a complex system of rituals which act to communicate ideological messages and sustain assumptions, which in turn have powerful consequences for teaching and learning (Henry, 1992; McLaren, 1986). The literature on ritual and schooling (McLaren, 1986, 1987; Henry, 1992; Bernstein 1975; Bernstein, Elvin & Peters 1966) has centred on the sociological issues of maintaining control and order, and on the transmission and internalisation of school norms.

In his analysis of schooling, Bernstein (1975) investigates the role of consensual and differentiating rituals in British state schools, with reference to problems of continuity, order, boundary and ambivalence towards the social order. He suggests that "rituals facilitate the transmission and internalisation of the expressive order of the school, create consensus, revivify the social order within the individual, and deepen respect for authority relations" (p. 65). Thus the school's shared values, norms and the mechanisms

which perpetuate social consensus are prone to ritualisation through consensual and differentiating rituals and the rituals become an expression of the culture of the school.

Attempts have been made to link ritual with pedagogy and according to McLaren (1986) these have been both tenuous and undisciplined. In his ethnographic study of a Catholic junior high school, McLaren uses ritual to examine the form and content of classroom instruction. He examines daily life in the classroom, as students leave what he terms the "streetcorner state" and enter the "student state" and in the process he pays attention to the symbolic realm and the way schooling is learned through bodily gestures.

McLaren's analysis of classroom instruction leads him to construct the following categories of school rituals. These are; micro rituals which consist of the individual lessons that take place on a day to day basis; macro rituals which are the individual lessons which together make up the single school day; revitalization rituals which function to inject a renewal of commitment in the participants; intensification rituals which serve to recharge students or teachers and to unify the group; and rituals of resistance or rituals of conflict where participants attempt to consciously or unconsciously subvert school rules, norms or values. McLaren proposes that as cultural sites, classrooms constitute powerful symbol systems and thus allows us the opportunity to gain greater understanding of cultural realities.

Henry (1992) examines school rituals as educational contexts which reflect school purposes. Rituals in two private schools are compared and the schools' differing perceptions of the world, relations to others and the individual or "self" are discussed. In both schools, Henry found education to mean more than merely instructing students in technical skills and a body of knowledge. She suggests rituals provide excellent examples of the different ideals that schools can hold and demonstrate quite different forms of action. To this end she concludes that educators should reflect on the

assumptions and values created and sustained through ritual as they have powerful consequences for teaching and learning.

Ritual and Pedagogy

Classrooms have been identified as rich sources of ritual systems which act to create and sustain assumptions and values and which in turn have powerful consequences for how students think and how they act (Henry, 1992; McLaren, 1986). Through interactions, students and teachers construct a culture of their classroom, a learned way of doing, feeling and thinking which is then transmitted and affirmed through well-defined, ritualised patterns of behaviour.

A study which investigates classroom life across the year levels was conducted by Johnson (1985). In this study, Johnson provides an account of the day to day happenings in preschool through to sixth grade in a rural, mid-western elementary school. He proposes that public schools and school classrooms are a small society and culture, a way of life into which children are initiated and conditioned. Through daily observations in classrooms, Johnson was able to note the recurring events and activities making up the major segments of the classroom day. He found initiation and rite of passage to be two common features of every system of education and as such are vehicles for the reproduction and regeneration of culture and society. These features can be helpful in better understanding the educational life of our society.

At the preschool level, Johnson found that schooling initiates children into the nature of school and the process of schooling. It represents the separation phase in the rite of passage, as children are separated from their families and households and from influences other than those occurring within the confines of the classroom. At this level,

children are expected to learn "deference to non kin adult strangers, acceptance of a lack of privacy, acceptance of the arbitrary orders of unrelated and unfamiliar strangers, and continual teacher surveillance and monitoring" (Johnson, 1985, p. 49). These are just some of the overt and covert social and cultural lessons students are expected to learn in the early stages of schooling.

In other studies conducted in the early years of schooling, specific program events have been investigated with reference to what really happens at these specific times and what the implications are for the participants. Reich (1994) selected the curricula event of 'circle time' in different day-care centres as a means of exploring the social and educational content of this event. Reich concluded that circle time is both a ritual and meeting. It enables the teacher to structure activities and to indicate changes during the day. For the children, circle time is an opportunity for affirmitory meetings whilst also experiencing restraint where discipline and coercion are common. Similar conclusions were found by Pasma (1992) who examined the ritual of 'sharing time' in a first grade classroom in the United States. Pasma found that the ritual functions as a deeply cultured event, reaffirms the ideal model of a 'good communicator' and develops a concept of 'self-as-autonomous-person'. For Pasma, the ritual of sharing time reveals how a diverse and multi-ethnic group of children comprise a single speech community and culture.

The pre-primary teacher's day to day classroom practice reflects clearly defined sets of organisation and routine. These routines are acted out and instituted through repetitive patterns of actions which have the appearance of unconsidered and effortless automaticity. It is this effortlessness that perpetuates the idea that routine is primitive and inflexible. However, Olson (1992) describes classroom routines as "expressive texts" (p. 26), embodying meaning and transmitting the ethos of the classroom. McLaren (1985) also raises the status of routine when he describes routine action as "more than a ritual surrogate and is a genuine form of ritualised behaviour" (p. 165). In a study by

Leinhardt, Weidman and Hammond (1987) teachers were observed to build simple routines to form more elaborate strings of action, thus increasing the variety and complexity in the classroom. These authors describe routine as shared socially scripted patterns of behaviour which allow instruction to proceed fluidly and efficiently.

In this study, I have adopted McLaren's view of routine as a 'milder', more subtle form of ritual which reflects teachers' judgements about how to structure life in the classroom and I have categorised routine as a low form of ritual. My reason for including routine as a form of ritualised behaviour, is that I believe routines are a dimension of everyday life and have the potential to be ritualised. Routines are central to a teacher's work and are an expression of what teachers know and how teachers operate. Routines are a tool used by experienced teachers and assist teachers in structuring patterns which make the normal flow of classroom life predictable and stylised.

Ritual and Teachers' Knowledge and Beliefs About Teaching

In the religious sense, rituals are a series of actions which dramatically portray and symbolically reflect the "truths" of a particular religion (Tremmel, 1976). The reverent performance, therefore, becomes an articulated account of the original meaning accompanying the sacred action. According to Tremmel (1976) both the action and the meaning or myth are based on a prior belief system. This belief system structures community life and acts to establish the customs, institutions and beliefs of that community. As expressed by Campbell (cited in Tremmel, 1976), ritual and the accompanying myth become a vital meaning system which enables persons to better understand the natural world order around them, and gives them a framework for understanding the society in which they live. Likewise, teachers carry vital meaning

systems which form the basis of organised sets of actions which invisibly guide and influence their work .

In the classroom, a teacher makes choices and decisions about what is pedagogically sound and worthwhile based on a personal ideology, value system and understanding of teaching and learning. Thus personal beliefs and values which develop over time structure life in the classroom and are communicated through sets of actions put in place by the teacher. Ritualised practices communicate certain messages and represent expressions of teacher knowledge and intended goals and depict a teacher's particular world view. Teaching requires a teacher to constantly make plans, judgements and decisions and to turn these into action. Thus teachers are seen as actively constructing their knowledge base and more specifically, their classroom agendas and then transmitting these through their day to day ritualised action.

The literature on teachers' personal practical professional knowledge is both large and diverse and Clandinin and Connelly (1995) provide a comprehensive outline of the various strands of this literature currently at work. This study is particularly concerned with making clear teachers' intentions and desires for working in a particular way thus exposing the knowledge base of teachers' classroom action. Over an extended period of time classroom teachers accumulate a considerable amount of practical knowledge about teaching. This knowledge primarily gained through classroom experience is reflected in teachers' day to day teaching. Thus classroom culture conveys a set of shared ideas and meanings; the values, beliefs and understandings created by the members of that social group and is developed and sustained by the teacher through elaborate strings of action which include ritual, ceremony and routine.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) adopt the metaphor of a professional knowledge landscape which teachers inhabit as a way of conceptualising their personal practical

knowledge. These authors describe teachers' knowledge as "that body of convictions and meanings, conscious and unconscious that have arisen from experience and that are expressed in a person's practices" (p. 7). This type of knowledge accumulates from a person's experience, involvement and understandings both on a mental and physical level and it is this knowledge which teachers bring to their work. As expressed by Clandinin and Connelly (1995), "when we see practice, we see personal practical knowledge at work" (p. 7).

In categorising knowledge of teaching, Buchmann (1987) refers to folkways of teaching as that which is "a matter of usages and social customs" (p. 4). Folkways are patterns of action and interpretations. They are considered right and express in symbol and action what teaching is about. Thus, folkways of teaching involve that which is typical, generally considered half-conscious habit and common sense, and is learned by tradition and imitation based on customs and habit. Particular action associated with folkways include well rehearsed situation-specific patterns of action that have the nature of habit. Buchmann suggests that teachers subsist by means of the folkways of teaching. Despite critical literature and reform movements in education, teachers tend to do what they have always done in the classroom, what they feel comfortable with, and what traditionally has been considered successful. Much of their interactive teaching consists of routines which are familiar to the students and which allows the teacher freedom to focus on the more dynamic features of teaching.

Summary

This study is about teaching in pre-primary classroom settings. A key issue in this study is that ritual is enacted by teachers in their every day classroom activities and as such must play an important role in teachers' and students' existence. The question of whether ritual is a mindless, unspecified activity for the teacher, a way of filling in the

day, or alternatively a sophisticated means by which the teacher systematically translates intentions is of particular interest in this study.

Classroom rituals may be viewed as either a mindless or a purposeful experience for both performers and participants. In some instances ritual may denote a simple event that is taken for granted, yet conversely, ritual may be an expression of personal knowledge and intentions where teachers pursue certain pedagogical aims and purposes. It may be that ritual enables the teacher to work within a framework which has the appearance of a simple systematic approach, or on the other hand the ritualised framework may act as a profound experience for the teacher and as a basis for inquiry and exploration for those participating. However, the extent to which teachers consciously and actively think through, plan and use ritual to achieve particular pedagogical objectives or outcomes is not known.

The study focuses on the examination of the role of ritual in structuring teaching and the extent to which ritual serves a pedagogical purpose for teachers. The question of whether ritual goes beyond the functions of social order and control and becomes a framework for deeper symbolic meaning is a key consideration of this work. A great proportion of the research on ritual and teaching has been conducted in the private school system where emphasis has been on the cultural and social dimensions of what can be classified as, alternative schooling . Authors cited attempt to explore ritual from the point of view of social transmission and expressions of culture. Whilst McLaren (1986) applies the concept of ritual to the events and conditions which provide the context for classroom instruction, the degree to which ritual and teaching are interconnected has been largely under-examined. Consequently, this study investigates the extent to which ritual serves a pedagogical purpose for teachers.

This chapter has explored a number of definitions of ritual found in the literature, with particular attention to structure, function and qualities of ritual which may be translated to educational settings. The literature indicates that little research has been conducted in the area of ritual and early childhood education. The difficulty of arriving at a universal definition of ritual has been illustrated and so for the purpose of this study, Friedrich's (1966) summary of key concepts has been adopted as a framework. Friedrich's view of ritual as part of the dimensions of culture and as the expression of deeper-lying values, attitudes, ideas and sentiments of the individuals in a community, forms the basis for examining ritual in pre-primary classroom settings.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The conceptual framework for this study has been derived from the theoretical perspectives which I have discussed in Chapter 2 and from my personal beliefs, values and experience in teaching young children and in early childhood teacher education. The conceptual framework represents the concepts and constructs under consideration in this study and shapes the fieldwork and collection and analysis of data.

My intention in this study is to describe and interpret ritual systems as understood and enacted by pre-primary teachers and to explore the relationship between ritual and pedagogy. Since ritual systems permeate and orchestrate life in the classroom, by studying ritual I expect to understand an aspect of teaching which is overlooked when ritualised and non-ritualised actions are conflated, as has typically been the case in studies of pedagogy in early childhood education.

I should point out that the study does not attempt to directly examine ritual from the pupil's perspective, that is, what is learned or received by the pupils through their involvement in the ritual performance. Although this is a matter of considerable importance, it falls outside the scope of this study. However it is recognised that pupils

are participants in the ritual and are part of the ecology of the classroom, an environment-for-action (Shotter & Newsen, 1982) where members exist in a reciprocal relationship and learn through interaction.

Interpretive Perspective

The theoretical perspective underlying this study is an interpretive one and represents a particular kind of inquiry. The goal of interpretation is to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 1994). According to Schwandt

> The constructivist or interpretivist believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it. The inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors. To prepare an interpretation is itself to construct a reading of these meanings; it is to offer the inquirer's construction of the constructions of the actors one studies. (1994, p. 118)

Thus interpretive theory has developed out of interest in the lives and perspectives of people in society (Erickson, 1986). Through prolonged social interaction, the emic point of view is sought as a means of making meaning which is situation-specific and socially constructed. Schwandt (1994) reports that the interpretivist struggles with the tensions between subjectivity and objectivity and with drawing a line between the object of investigation and the investigator. The strength of interpretive research is that it is placed within a negotiated and collaborative relationship between the researcher and the

researched. Participants within a particular situation construct meaning from events through complex processes of social interaction (Schwandt, 1994).

Interpretivists seek to make responsible decisions or interpretations based on ethical principles which guide the ethical decision. I pursued this process in a context of carefully negotiated collaboration between myself and the participants. A collaboration characterised by a shared understanding of the task, that is, the risk of exposure, mutual trust, exchange of experiences and reciprocal authentication of interpretations. In this way I focused on understanding what the participants in a particular setting perceived, believed and did, and how they made sense of their world through practical reasoning and understanding .

This study examines pre-primary classrooms as cultural settings: the customs, practices and traditions of a social group, more particularly from the point of view of ritual activity and performance. Interpretive accounts of ritual within the culture of the pre-primary classroom, seek to make sense of actions and expressions in order to specify meaning and to make some suggestions, considerations and speculations about the actions and expressions as part of the classroom system.

As previously indicated, the study does not explore what pupils learn from ritual activity, nor is evidence drawn from pupils. Rather, ritual is used as a lens through which to explore and interpret the classroom practices of pre-primary teachers, the forms, function and content of ritual. The focus, therefore, is on the teachers, their intentions, beliefs and goals of teaching and on the search for meaningful interpretations of how teachers plan, structure and manage ritual. Jennings (1982) suggests that ritual functions as a pedagogical technique for the transmission of some store of knowledge and it is the description and interpretation of this function of ritual which is the focus of investigation in this study.

Dimensions of Ritual

The conceptual framework for this study presumes that classrooms are rich sources of ritual action and that teachers construct and enact rituals as part of their daily teaching. Rappaport's (1989) definition of ritual as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances" (p. 467) is an important observation, suggesting that rituals have both variant and invariant qualities. According to Jennings (1982) it is the variation in the ritual performance which holds the key to exploration and discovery. "If there is no variation in the performance there is neither search nor discovery" (Jennings, 1982, p. 114) and the ritual merely becomes a dramatic representation of what is already known. Alternatively, the invariant order of ritual, the repetitive, patterned and perfected rhythm of the ritual action provides the necessary stable framework, an uncontested pattern of doing and knowing how to act. In pedagogical terms, teachers may use ritual to structure lessons and maintain order and sequence, while at the same time deliberately varying elements in order to achieve pedagogical objectives. Thus the interplay of variant and invariant features of ritual will form an important component in the conceptual framework of this study.

Rituals take many forms and for the purpose of this investigation, I have classified the various forms of ritual based on the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and on observations conducted during a preliminary pilot phase of this study. Classroom events and activities can be categorised broadly as *non-ritual* and *ritual* activity. The broad category of *non-ritual* activity includes those spontaneous, ad hoc and idiosyncratic activities which teachers initiate as part of the daily classroom happenings, whilst the broad category of *ritual* activity has been grouped into two sub-categories, these being *invariant* and *variant* ritual. Within the sub-category of *invariant* ritual, further

classifications of ritual forms have been identified as *macro* ritual, *high* ritual and *institutional* ritual. The sub-category of *invariant* ritual has been further classified as *micro* ritual, *low* ritual and *personal* ritual.

The sub-category of *invariant* ritual is characterised as static, repetitive, ordered, formalised and elevated in status. A distinctive feature of *invariant* ritual is that there is little change. The sub-category of *macro* ritual is that which McLaren (1986) describes as the aggregate of daily activities, but also includes the weekly and yearly schedule which relate to structure and act to maintain certainty and uniformity for the participants. Here the surface messages are patterned and perfected and thus provide a framework for the daily, weekly and yearly program which act to maintain consistency and predictability. In pre-primary settings the daily and weekly timetable represents a ritualised structure which teachers reverently adhere to and which provide continuity, a sense of security and comfort for all participants.

High rituals are those rituals usually ascribed elevated status, such as celebrations, cultural and social events, community and school events and which represent a more formal occasion. Examples of high rituals in pre-primary includes celebrating special events such as Christmas, Easter, Father's Day, Mother's Day, Birthdays and community events such as Book Week and Western Australia Week.

Institutional rituals are those happenings which have been put in place by the establishment or hierarchy, to mark significant events or to maintain tradition. Examples of institutional rituals in pre-primary are sports day, joining the school for assembly, or observing activities such as 'snack time', and 'circle time'.

The sub-category of *variant* ritual permits variations in behaviour within the framework of the ritual itself and have the potential to transmit new messages. Thus,

when teachers vary what have otherwise become traditional classroom rituals such as sitting in circle for fruit time, or gathering and dismissing children in formalised patterns, the ritual not only takes on different forms but may also express more complex messages to participants by virtue of the particular variations.

Micro ritual denotes those routinised, every day actions which together make up the daily events of the program. For example, mat time, followed by activity time; fruit time, followed by story time. *Low* and *personal* ritual are those ritualised activities which are lower in status and more personalised and which allow for individuality and variation. These ritual forms provide continuity and predictability yet at the same time there is scope for personalisation.

Examples of *low* rituals are those "paler, less authentic actions" (McLaren, 1986, p. 40) which include routines, but which nevertheless are genuine forms of ritual. In pre-primary, examples of *low* rituals include arrival, greeting the teacher, transitions between set periods of the day, packing away equipment, gathering and dismissing children and checking the weather. *Low* rituals account for the individualisation of curricular events in pre-primary settings and pertain to those rituals set in place to fulfil specific goals.

In pre-primary settings, *personal* rituals take on an intimate form when teachers adapt and vary patterns of action to meet personal intentions. Thus, 'mat time', a traditional activity where children are assembled together in a whole group sharing time, and 'snack time', when children take a food break, are examples of rituals which may take on particular, personalised forms.

What is important to note here is that it is difficult to draw clear and permanent boundaries between these categories and forms of ritual. The categories are not always

mutually exclusive. Indeed, in some cases a ritual may fit more than one category, for example, *low* and *personal* rituals may overlap. The classification is meant to serve the purpose of providing a systematic way of approaching the various configurations likely to be encountered, rather than representing some kind of empirical reality. I am not suggesting, for example, that teachers conceptualise their classroom rituals in these terms. Table 1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the categories of ritual activity in classrooms which have been discussed.

Table 1. Categories and Forms of Ritual Activity.

Categories	Forms of ritual	Examples
INVARIANT RITUAL	Macro	Formalised institutional event
	High rituals	Ceremonies and celebrations
	Institutional rituals	Daily, weekly, yearly schedule
VARIANT RITUAL	Micro	Every day activity which together make up the daily schedule
	Low rituals	Routinised activity
	Personal rituals	Distinctive action for specific intentions
NON RITUAL	Spontaneous, ad hoc activities	Initiated on the spot

The Conceptual Framework

In this study I am exploring the relationship between ritual and pedagogy. In particular, I am investigating the degree to which teachers may use ritual performance as a structure or tool for the transmission of knowledge. Also the extent to which teachers use variations in ritual as a means of deeper exploration, in order to achieve intentions and learning outcomes is explored. In other words, I am asserting that ritual becomes the structure through which learning is directly influenced. That is, through ritual pupils learn values, attitudes, and social norms. Both teacher and pupils internalise the cultural and social construction of the classroom as symbolised in the ritual. As well, ritual can enable the teacher to frame a pedagogy and thereby facilitate learning. Ritual can set up conditions of learning, which then allows the teacher to move within the ritual structure, thus providing variations and flexibility in the act of teaching. This use of ritual allows an expression of beliefs, an openness to change and it is the variation which makes possible the view that ritual action is a mode of "coming to know" (Jennings, 1982, p. 112).

The conceptual framework is represented in three components, ritual knowledge, ritual performance, and ritual outcome. Firstly, ritual knowledge represents that knowledge which teachers bring to the ritual. Teachers' knowledge of the educational curriculum, their intentions, philosophical beliefs and pedagogical purpose, both stated and unstated, inform and shape decisions about practice. In addition, knowledge of teaching includes the folkways of teaching: those pedagogical and curriculum practices learned by experience and common sense and generally based on tradition and custom. Ritual knowledge also includes knowledge of the ritual itself which in turn provides a context and conditions for learning. Teachers may or may not vary ritual depending on their personal intentions and the learning outcomes to be achieved.

Secondly, the ritual performance of teacher and pupils is the enactment of a patterned selection of actions, a series of encoded movements which may be viewed along a continuum from highly predictable (high level of invariance) at one end, to highly spontaneous (high level of variance) at the other end. Within ritual actions with a high level of invariance the teacher draws together actions and events into a meaningful, rehearsed, ordered pattern which is systematically established as part of a repertoire of teaching. This enables the teacher to go about the daily business of teaching in a well defined, predictable and automatic way. For example, the ritualised activity of 'mat time' is one which is highly structured by the teacher and is understood by the pupils as a time when a high degree of attention and controlled behaviour is expected and that the teacher will direct and manipulate the proceedings. Participants in this ritual conform to the order and action which communicates messages of certainty, conformity, and unquestionableness. Thus, invariant ritual actions may serve to stabilise conditions for the transmission of knowledge and in doing so provide less room for individual action because of the more regulated or controlled approach to teaching.

Ritualised action with high levels of variance, enables the teacher to generate a wider range of activities which carry more information. An example of this is when the teacher uses a 'surprise bag' as a strategy to engender an element of wonder and curiosity for the children. This performance has the potential for variance through opening up possibilities for discovery and exploration for the participants and goes beyond the messages transmitted by invariance. Thus, within the ritual performance, ritual knowledge and pedagogy are connected and different forms of ritual act to structure and mediate that knowledge.

Variations in ritual may serve to increase the amount of information transmitted and maximises individual learning opportunities. The participants become co-celebrants actively engaged and responding to a vital pedagogy that emphasises creativity and

exploration. In this case, a ritual form is not just a representation of the already known but is also a mode of coming to know, a seeking of the right action or sequence of actions. McLaren (1985) explains, when levels of variation are excessively high the pattern is lost and actions become forms of random, spontaneous movements which lack both predictability and patterns of meaning and result in sporadic, compulsive gestures. At this stage the action possesses few of the qualities of ritual defined by Grimes (1990).

Thirdly, ritual outcome represents what is learned from the ritual. Defining how much is learned from ritual performance is difficult and disputable and not the intention of this study. However, ritual performance does become an expression of a particular classroom culture and style of teaching. Personal values, attitudes and practical knowledge are transmitted and established through sets of behaviours and rituals become an enactment of a particular way of teaching and a reflection of personal beliefs and ideology. In addition, both the overt and the hidden curriculum are transmitted through ritual performance. Particpants are exposed to the overt content knowledge whilst the hidden messages of conformity, predictability and unquestionableness are conveyed.

The three components of the conceptual framework are not intended to be viewed as a simple linear or causal sequence. Rather, they are three parts that are fused in practice but separated for analytical purposes. In this study the second component has been the primary focus, whilst the first and third components provide a more holistic context. Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the relationship between ritual and pedagogy.

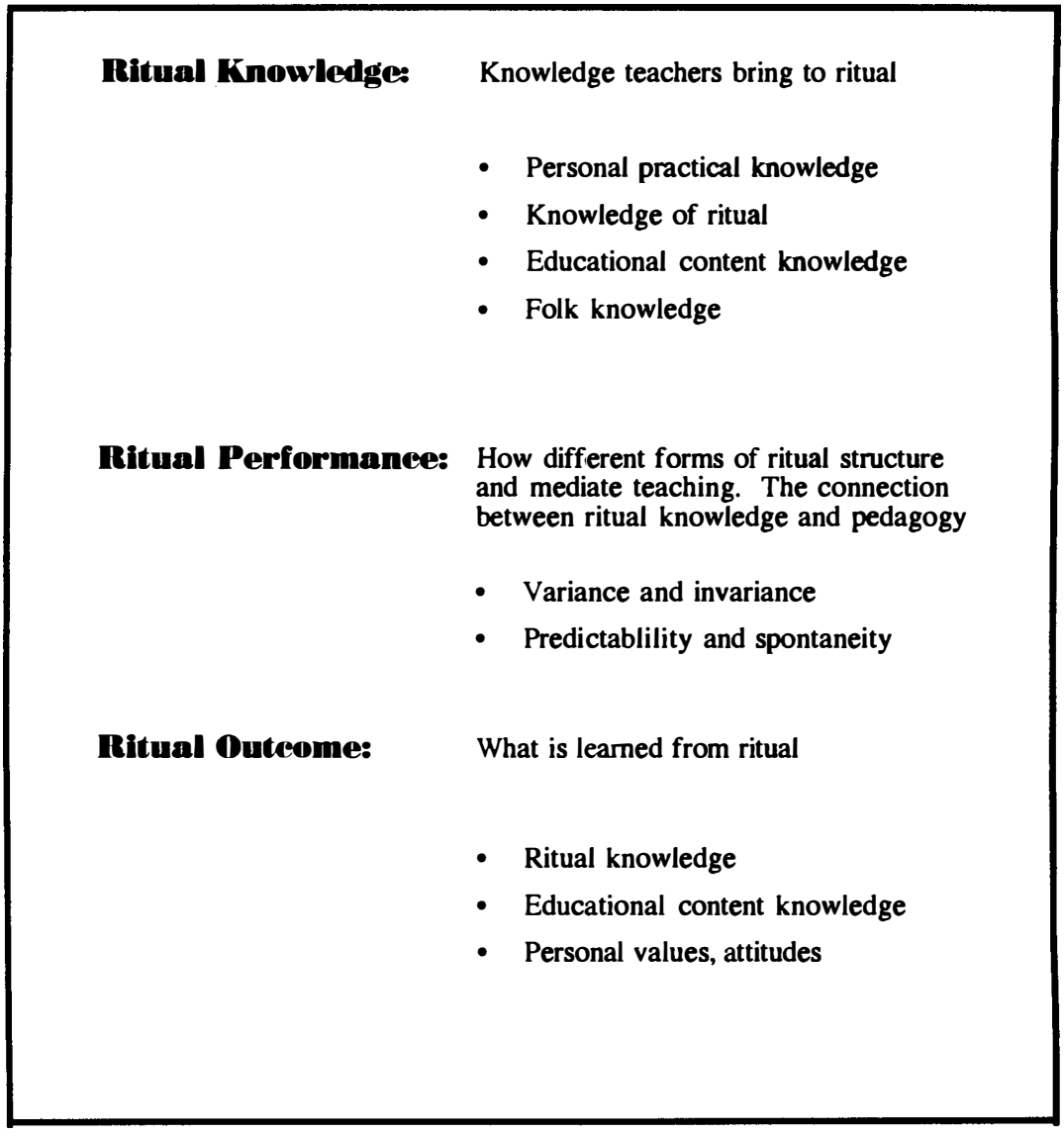

Figure 1. Summary of the Three Components of the Conceptual Framework

Summary

In this chapter I have provided an account of the key concepts and assumptions under consideration in this study. An interpretive perspective will guide the inquiry into the ritual performance of teachers working in pre-primary classroom settings. I contend that in order to understand the role ritual plays in structuring teaching in the pre-primary setting it is necessary to understand how teachers plan, structure and manage ritual. Furthermore, dimensions of ritual activity and forms of ritual have been categorised and these categories will be used as a framework for exploring and analysing ritual performance in the three classrooms.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology used to explore the questions outlined in Chapter One. Here, I explain the procedures used to experience extended first hand contact with three participants, in order to describe and explain the daily events in three classrooms. I begin with an overview of ethnography and how this method fits within the framework of this study and explain how case study is used as a research design for organising and reporting data. Next, I describe the participants involved in the study and the methods used to gather and analyse data. Finally, I outline some of the limitations of the methodology in relation to validity, reliability and replicability.

Ethnography

This investigation and data analysis is guided and shaped by the need to interpret, understand and describe meanings and processes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) related to the experiences and behaviours of teachers in the pre-primary classroom setting. In the last fifteen years the study of classrooms has emerged as a rich source of research in its own right. Educational anthropologists use a variety of ethnographic techniques to describe educational settings and contexts. They explore and explain the cultural behaviours of

teachers and children in order to generate theory and to evaluate educational programs. Traditionally, ethnographers remain in the field for extensive periods of time, provide rich descriptions from which interpretations are concurrently made, whilst building a relationship of trust and respect for those involved in the study. However, as Wolcott (1987) argues, this alone does not convey 'ethnographic intent'.

The central requirement Wolcott places on ethnographic research is that it must be oriented to cultural interpretation. Erickson (1973) further elaborates with the definition of ethnography as,

> the process of constructing through direct personal observation of social behaviour, a theory of the workings of a particular culture in terms as close as possible to the way members of that culture view the universe and organise their behaviour within it. (p. 18)

Hence, ethnography enables the researcher to get close to the social phenomena thereby facilitating a superior understanding of what is really happening (Hammersley, 1992). It attempts to describe, interpret and explain the social-cultural world of the classroom, whilst recognising the situational constraints of classrooms. As stated by LeCompte and Preissle (1993) "the immersion in another culture allows the researcher access to the phenomenological views of participants" (p. 5). Thus the researcher is in the research and is as involved as the participants in producing findings (Henry, 1992).

Ethnographers attempt to systematically describe variables or phenomena in order to generate conceptual categories and to draw and validate associations between phenomena. According to Erickson, (1986) this involves "being thorough and reflective in describing the every day events in the setting and in identifying the significance of actions in the events from the various points of view of the actors themselves" (p. 121).

Ethnographic accounts should not form the basis for judging whether situations or systems are good or bad, effective or ineffective. Qualitative researchers do not look for ways things can be improved, but rather we come to understand how a particular system works by providing detailed descriptive information and interpretations which lead to understanding meanings held by those involved. Ethnography invites a cultural interpretation and explanation of behaviour within a social setting rather than leading to a notion of improvement.

Rather than aiming for outright transference of results to groups not studied, ethnographers aim for comparability and translatability of findings. In this way the ethnographer clearly articulates the features and characteristics of the group studied so that they can serve as a basis for comparison, whilst assuming that the research methods, categories and phenomena are explicitly identified for confident comparisons to be made (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

This raises the issue of reliability and validity of ethnographic research which has been the subject of considerable debate in the research literature over the last decade. Given that this research paradigm's aim is the "reconstruction of the phenomena investigated... the description of shared beliefs, practices, artefacts, folk knowledge and behaviours of a group" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 54) the researcher's commitment lies in making a faithful and accurate rendition of the happenings. To this end ethnographers employ a number of strategies to reduce the problem of reliability and validity. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, the triangulation of data, the constant comparison and comprehensive checking with members (in this case, the participants themselves) leads to trustworthiness. Trustworthiness includes the concepts of credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is enhanced through prolonged sojourns in the field, long term observations, cross checking with participants and

associates, and joint analysis of video-taped sequences. Dependability is increased by 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) and the use of inquiry audits, whilst confirmability comes about through detailed field notes, memos, and personal notes kept during all phases of the study (Denzin, 1994).

This study adopts several features distinctive of ethnography. The study incorporates prolonged observations in three classroom settings, with rich descriptions of ritual and the events and conditions under which rituals are enacted. Hence, the data and interpretation evolved simultaneously and the fieldwork and analysis were concurrent. The study attempts to provide a cultural interpretation of human social behaviour within a natural setting. My purpose was to describe, understand and interpret meanings of ritual and processes related to the experiences and behaviours of teachers in the pre-primary classroom setting. The research enabled me to explore the world of each individual teacher, to describe and interpret the actions of the teachers as they organised their experiences and explained their behaviours (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

As previously mentioned, the focus was on the natural setting and I asked questions related to the social and cultural patterns of the classrooms whilst at the same time recognising the situational constraints of these classrooms. When describing and interpreting meanings and processes it was necessary to be thorough and reflective in identifying the significance of actions related to certain events from the various points of view of the actors themselves (Erickson, 1986). However, this is not to say that I, as the researcher, was devoid of pre-conceptions and frames of interpretation. Given my association and experience in the field of early childhood education it was natural that I would have a personal frame of reference. However, this made it more imperative than ever to ensure that a distinction was made between the etic and emic meanings. To this end careful and systematic cross-checking between researcher-imposed and participant-generated meanings through corroboration of information provided a method of validating

the interpretation of data. The data collection and analysis became a process of deliberate inquiry where problems, assertions and questions were constructed, confirmed and disconfirmed by the participants themselves.

It was felt that by investigating and interpreting the ritual systems held by teachers it may be possible to examine whether ritual goes beyond the functions of social order and control, and becomes a framework for deeper, intellectual exploration for the teacher. This assertion is grounded in pre-primary practicalities and settings in order to make meaningful interpretations of the actions as they occur within the environment. Thus, through 'thick description' that goes beyond mere reporting (Geertz, 1973) I attempted to probe the intention, motives, meanings and circumstances of ritual in order to gain an understanding of the direct lived experiences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Case Studies

The research was designed in the form of case studies of three teachers working in pre-primary classroom settings. Each of the single cases focused on the teacher within the context of an interactive classroom in order to optimise exploration and understanding of the "bounded systems" (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1976 p. 141), namely the three classrooms. My intention as researcher was to objectively identify, describe and interpret patterns in the teachers' behaviours, sets of actions, intentions and beliefs thus exploring what was both common and unique about the cases. The case studies were able to depict the three teachers as individuals and to address their distinctive characteristics as well as provide means for drawing and illustrating comparisons across the sites. As researcher I was interested in letting the cases tell their story by seeking out the emic meanings (Stake, 1994) held by the three teachers within each case.

The case study approach allowed me to experience and report three descriptive interpretations of data which Donmeyer (1990, p. 196) describes as "medium rare", that is, low inference descriptions which gives the reader an opportunity to enrich his or her understanding by accommodating and constructing a personal interpretation of the particular cases. Case studies are carried out in real situations where both the researcher and researched have particular responsibilities, expectations and obligations which may form frameworks for the conduct of the study (Adelman et al., 1976). According to Stake (1994), case study methods should enable the researcher to learn enough about the case to encapsulate complex meanings and to describe the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings and draw their own conclusions.

In the Field

The first phase of the study was used to negotiate entry and gain access to the field, and to develop a collaborative relationship with the participants. This phase was also used to alleviate participants' anxiety about being observed, and this experience was discussed in the early weeks of observation. Several modes of data collection were used and are summarised. Preliminary data were collected through life history techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) in order to provide a basis for personal interpretation and discussion. Participant observations were conducted one day a week in each of the settings where field notes were made and sequences of classroom action which represented a typical day in each of the centres were video-taped. During this phase of the study, unstructured interviews and discussions were conducted, which were transcribed and used to explore the roles, forms and functions of ritual in each of the settings.

The qualitative process inherent in this study was not a linear process. Normally this type of qualitative research implies that the researcher conducts fieldwork, compiles field notes, codes the data, interprets the data, and writes about the interpretations. However, I found that as Wasser and Bresler (1996) describe, the reflexive nature of interpretive research became more apparent. There was no clear definition of set phases of the study. I began the study by informally meeting with the three participants on an individual basis. On this occasion I explained my intentions and objectives for the investigation, and the method of inquiry I wished to follow. We discussed how they, as participants, might see their role in the research and I stressed the point that together we would be exploring and constructing an understanding of what was happening in the classroom. Participants were invited to consider their involvement and so ultimately participation was on the basis of informed consent. I sent written documentation to the principals of each school outlining the process and level of involvement anticipated from each of the participants.

I wanted to establish equal status in the research activity, with an emphasis on collaborative roles and relationships. I explained that we would be searching for the answers together, and that I was not the expert on the topic being investigated. In this way we would be collaborators in the project, sharing the interests we had in early childhood education. In the early stages of the research I worked to establish a sense of trust in areas of confidentiality and in developing confidence to share personal views, tolerate uncertainty and misunderstanding and in speaking openly and critically.

In the early stage of fieldwork, we established a pattern of action. I visited each school on a set day of the week, and observed a half-day session. I negotiated a set time for discussion and interviews and this occurred in the same place for the duration of the study, on an informal basis, most often over a cup of coffee. We generally began and ended the meeting with personal inquiries and conversations at a social level. In a sense,

the research process become ritualised. We each made a personal commitment to the enterprise and we invested our time and energy, thus attributing value to the process we were undertaking.

In the phase which followed, I conducted observations, made field notes, and constantly transcribed interview data and looked for relevant topics which warranted further elaboration and discussion. These were raised at subsequent meetings where my role as interviewer was to probe, question, solicit, support, encourage, bridge and link ideas. This process evolved slowly as the teachers developed confidence in me and in themselves and consequently, the nature of the discussions changed considerably as the study progressed. Concurrently, I began to make written accounts and descriptions of the teachers, settings and daily classroom activities. I began the process of authenticating data by giving these short descriptions to the participants for comment, verification and critiquing. Gradually as the three cases evolved, these were also shared with participants for further validation and verification. Hence data collection, analysis and confirmation became simultaneous tasks. In addition, I deliberately returned to the field on three separate occasions in order to capture certain features of classroom life typically displayed at certain times of the school year. In a sense, this also had a validating effect on the observations. When looking for repetitive patterns in the teacher's action, it was important to take the long term view, and look for repetition over more that one school year.

The participants

The three experienced pre-primary specialists involved in this study, were purposefully selected for the study based on recommendations of effectiveness and commitment to teaching. Each of the participants had a reputation for conducting effective

pre-primary programs and for being considered excellent models of practice within the field of early childhood education. The decision to purposefully select participants for this study was based on, firstly, the small size of the sample. Secondly, the fact that when investigating practice high levels of expertise should be provided as examples (Leinhardt, 1986). Thirdly, those teachers who were confident and had received positive feedback on their ability and expertise would be more likely to closely examine their own teaching practices and beliefs as required by the study (McLean, 1991). The selected participants were briefed on the purpose and intent of the study and on the methods to be employed. At this period, every effort was made to outline and establish collaborative roles and relationships in the research activity. A model was stressed in which all participants would be actively involved in negotiating and maintaining a mutually agreed ethical and professional framework (Day, 1991).

Helen and Diane were working within the state government education system, whilst Jean was the owner and head teacher of a Montessori Pre-School. In light of my personal background and experience in relation to the government education system, it was intended that the Montessori Pre-School would enable me to view the unfamiliar happenings of this environment with new eyes, and thus would raise pertinent questions and provide contrasts to be investigated across all the settings. This sample was not intended to be a representative sample.

Table 2 shows demographic details of the participants in this study. The participants ranged in age from 29 years to 56 years. Teaching experience ranged from nine years to thirty years and two teachers held formal qualifications in early childhood education, whilst one teacher was initially trained in primary education with a specialisation in the junior primary area (6-8 year age range). Radford Pre-Primary centre was located in a middle socio-economic suburb in the northern metropolitan region drawing on a homogeneous group in terms of social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

In this centre Helen conducted a four full day a week program for five year olds. Jean was the owner and head teacher of Swanleigh Montessori Pre-School, located in an older suburb, closer to the city centre, which is currently undergoing redevelopment resulting in surrounding schools experiencing a renewed influx of students. This factor, however, had little effect on Swanleigh as it attracted a wider clientele due to the school's fee paying structure. Attendance was based on four half day sessions for three to four year olds, with optional full day attendance for five year olds. Connor Pre-Primary centre was located in a coastal, middle socio-economic suburb which contains pockets of well established state government assisted housing, together with more recently developed housing estates considered to be at the high end of the real estate market. Children attended Diane's centre in two groups for four half day sessions a week with one group being five years olds, and the other four year olds. The five year old group was observed in this study.

Table 2. Demographic Details of the Participants in the Study.

PARTICIPANT	LOCATION	AGE	TEACHING EXPERIENCE
HELEN	RADFORD PP State Government Middle socio-economic area Four full days a week 5 year olds	56 Years	Thirty three years
JEAN	SWANLEIGH MONTESSORI PS Privately owned, fee paying pre-school On fringe of city Optional sessional or full day attendance 3-5 year olds	42 Years	Eight years as a Kindergarten teacher Three years as owner and head teacher at Swanleigh
DIANE	CONNOR PP State Government Middle socio-ecomonic area Sessional attendance of 4 half days a week 5 year olds	29 Years	Nine years

Gathering data

The methods used to gather data in this investigation were based on the ethnographer's need to observe, report, interpret and discuss behaviour (Wolcott, 1987) thus providing a way of "explaining the social world and the operation of educational phenomena within this world" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 28). The techniques included prolonged observations in the field, one day a week for a total period of seven calendar months, with careful recording in the form of field notes and observational records. In addition, interviews and discussions were audio-taped and held with each participant after each observation session. Interviews generally lasted one hour with extra time spent in informal and personal conversations. Audio records were subsequently

transcribed for analysis. A schedule of visits and interviews is included in Appendix 2. Finally, classroom sequences of action which represented a typical day's activity were video-taped to provide a means for eliciting teachers' explanations of, and comments on specific classroom rituals.

Participant observation

The study of ritual within the realm of anthropology has traditionally incorporated prolonged participant observations in the field where the researcher becomes immersed in the situation in order to describe and interpret action and meaning. Participant observation represents a method of conducting field work; of collecting data, making sense of the interpretations, and returning to the field to verify and check out the explanations. In this way, the data and interpretations evolve concurrently, each informing the other. Denzin (1978, p. 186) describes four roles of participant-observer, according to the degree of participation versus observation conducted in the field. He describes the role of 'participant as observer' as one where the researcher moves through phases of establishing rapport and relationships, defining the role of observer and the observed and being accepted as a member of the community. 'Participant as observer' enables the researcher to both balance the degree of participation and observation during the course of the study, according to the stages of research and the constraints of the setting and to focus on the elicitation and exposition of human meaning within the social world (Erickson, 1986).

Consequently, field work took the form of recording data during periods of participant observation where I shared the day to day experiences of the three teachers being studied. The observations were conducted once a week in each centre, for the duration of a teaching session. In all cases, a session constituted a half day period. My

observations began in August 1994, the beginning of the third (out of four) school term, and continued to December 1994, the end of the school year. In 1995 I resumed observations for the month of February, this being the beginning of the new school year. At this stage all teachers were working with new groups of children, but as my research focus centred on the teachers' actions and intentions, I was able to observe them working with a new group of children and to witness the teachers setting up classroom procedures, inducting children into classroom routines and establishing rules, expectations and guidelines for the new incoming group. Further observations were conducted in August and September of 1995, one year from the commencement of the data collection. This provided me with an overlap in time and an opportunity to observe and compare the behaviours of the teachers one year later.

At the beginning stages of data collection the teachers in the government school system introduced me to the class as a 'visitor' who was there to watch how the centre worked. When the children were seated on the floor as a whole group, I sat a little apart from them, on the edge of the mat area usually close to the parent helper. When the children broke into small groups I made my way to a group and sat close by or positioned myself strategically so I could observe the teacher's involvement in the ongoing classroom experiences. Gradually, over time, as I became more familiar with the routine I became more involved in the classroom activity. This was somewhat unavoidable, as the children automatically made the first moves to draw me into their daily experiences. I quickly began to feel comfortable and accepted by all as part of the classroom scene.

At the Montessori school, there was no formal introduction and I was left to slowly become immersed in the system of the classroom. I sat to the side of the classroom and followed the teacher from one room to another, always at a distance, and was careful not to initiate conversation with the children. Montessori has a policy of no parent interaction in class time and in the early stages I struggled with what my role

should be. At the government schools I talked freely to children and they spontaneously approached me to show their work or to ask for assistance, or merely to make conversation. At Montessori, I was aware that my role should not be to offer assistance even when it was asked for and so I deliberately refrained from encouraging conversation and involvement. I felt I was on the fringe of the action for a much longer period of time in this setting, but eventually clarified my position with the teacher and took my lead from her. Needless to say children are children, full of curiosity, no matter what setting they are in and contact was not totally avoided and over time I became a part of their classroom life.

During observations my intention was to record the ongoing experiences that made up life in the classroom and to create an accurate and detailed account of the teachers' actions and practices and the events which form part of their day to day teaching. Denzin (1978) explains that adopting the perspective of those being studied means that the development and unfolding of the social action over time and across situations must be followed as closely as possible. The central concern, therefore, is to link the interaction patterns with the symbols and meanings believed to underlie the behaviour. My concern was that teachers should not feel impeded or threatened by my presence and during the early visits we talked about their experience of being observed, and during these observations I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. I moved about the groups of children and worked with individuals, in order to 'take the pressure off the teacher' and this became a settling in period for all involved. Over time the teachers relaxed and often I would be drawn into classroom conversation as part of the group.

I assumed the role which Denzin (1978) describes as "participant as observer" (p. 188). In this role the researcher moves through phases of establishing rapport and relationships, defining the role of observer and the observed and being accepted as a member of the community. This role enabled me to balance the degree of participation

and observation during the course of the study, according to the stages of research and constraints of the setting. The first stage occurred before I actually began the school visits. I talked to the teachers involved in the study and explained my intentions and role. Rather than present myself as a researcher and observer, I took the perspective of an interested colleague and drew on my role as an early childhood educator. In addition, I tried to establish a collaborative partnership model in that the project was a joint venture in pursuit of answers, where I was the novice and they the experts.

The early days of observation and discussion were informal and spontaneous in nature. Time was spent enabling the teacher to accept and feel comfortable with another's presence and involvment in the classroom as well as developing confidence in each other. The next stage saw the establishment of rapport and trust, and a clearer definition of roles emerge. Generally, the nature of the contact was relaxed and informal, and an enduring relationship developed, to the extent that I was extended invitations to attend various school functions and special events, such as one teacher's celebration of her twentieth year of teaching at her current school, and the wedding ceremony of another of the teachers.

Field notes

The major strategy for recording data was the running record which was completed whenever possible during actual observation or as soon as possible thereafter. In a large notebook on the right hand page, I kept an objective record of the details of what happened in the classroom settings. Concrete descriptions of social behaviour and processes, together with descriptive outlines of the actors involved, the teachers, assistants (where appropriate) and children were presented, as well as accounts of events and the nature of the action and behaviours. I endeavoured to produce "rich descriptions"

with continual reassessment of purpose and priorities (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) and snippets of dialogue relevant to what occurred in the stream of behaviour. On the left hand page of the notebook I kept a personal narrative and made interpretations of meaning about the recurrent patterns of behaviour and actions observed. Many of the questions raised in this section were used to focus future observations, and formed the basis of discussions and interviews.

One important part of the process of building the field notes was the reflective material, the speculations, feelings, problems, ideas, judgements and impressions which went along with the objective recording. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe this process of reflection as one way of attempting to acknowledge and control the observer's effect in qualitative research, which is sometimes viewed as a weakness of that methodology.

Interviews

Audio-taped interviews were held with the teachers in order to accumulate tangible data recorded in the informant's own words. The participant observations served as a means for checking perceptions in the field and for suggesting topics and themes which were further explored during these discussions and interviews. Most times interviews occurred immediately after an observation session when children had left the centre. However, for one of the participants a special time was arranged after school and this remained constant for the length of the data collection phase. Interviews occurred either in the teachers' office or at a small table in the centre. On several occasions, conversations held whilst the teacher and I supervised the children in the outdoor areas were also recorded. All interviews were fully transcribed and provided a concrete detailed record which supplemented the field notes. The interviews were unstructured, in-depth interviews, used in an attempt to understand the complex behaviour of the participants

without imposing any limitations to the field of inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Both directive and non-directive questioning enabled participants to raise topics and issues and to return to them at will.

The interviewing process, an individual face to face verbal interchange began by inviting the participants to tell their life story. This recount had two purposes, firstly it was felt that by talking about themselves the participants would begin to feel at ease with me and comfortable talking freely with the tape-recorder operating. Secondly, the personal history provided valuable information regarding the background experiences of each of the participants, the various stages and ways of thinking that people pass through as they shape their personal perspectives on life (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The process of recounting personal history also provided opportunities for reflecting on past experience and the participants accumulated knowledge of teaching.

Not all participants were immediately articulate and confident in their responses. For Helen, despite the length of her teaching experience, being placed in a position of justifying her actions and explaining her beliefs and practices was foreign to her and therefore she initially found this difficult. After the first three interviews I made some suggestions for topics for discussion in the form of 'advanced organisers' so she had time before the following visit to consider the issues and questions and this seemed to be more effective for her. Gradually she gained confidence and her ideas flowed more freely.

Video recording

A final method of collecting data was the video-taping of a typical teaching session in the classroom. My intention was not to accumulate endless hours of video taped recordings, but rather to capture typical classroom sequences in order to provide a means

for eliciting teachers' interpretive comments of specific classroom events. A typical session was arranged to be recorded towards the end of the school year (December, 1994). I personally operated a hand held video recorder and scanned the group with the purpose of capturing the teacher as she went about her daily work.

Erickson (1982) suggests that 'viewing sessions' are an approach to testing the coherence and validity of the emerging theoretical perspectives and for triangulation of evidence. These video sessions provided me with a record of specific classroom events which were used to interact with the participants about their specific behaviours. I sat with each of the teachers to view the video-taped records and to elicit reactions, retrospective comments and interpretations. In this way participant's accounts of what was happening provided a means of guiding inferences and were extremely useful in forming hypotheses and interpretations.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of data began concurrently with participant observations and interviews. During these initial stages, I began to make personal notes and memos as I formulated and clarified hunches, ideas, questions, and problems as they arose. I constantly reviewed the data collected for familiarity and looked for patterns and categories and the relationships among those categories. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) explain this process as theorising and is a fundamental tool of any researcher. "It is used to develop or confirm explanations for how and why things happen as they do" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 239). Theorising includes tasks such as perceiving, comparing, contrasting, ordering, establishing links and relationships, and speculating and is used throughout the research process.

From previous research in the area of ritual and schooling, relevant literature, and personal experience, I developed a pre-theoretical assertion about the role ritual might play in the pedagogy of pre-primary teachers. Thus the inquiry took the form of analytic induction as described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983).

During field work, personal notes and inferences were documented and these formed the basis of questions, puzzlements, themes and issues which were discussed and clarified on a weekly basis with the three teachers. Field notes and interview transcripts were examined and particular behaviours were identified. I looked for patterns of action which were performed on a regular basis, scripted and highly valued by the teachers. We explored the meanings teachers had attributed to these actions and I looked for consistencies, regularities and for differences across the three settings. I also noted that the three teachers talked about similar subjects and so a number of common topics began to emerge.

Checking data

Throughout the process of participant observation and interviews, I was careful not to impose my interpretations or ideas on the participants. During this stage I wrote descriptive accounts of the teachers, their views of teaching, their images of self as teachers, the setting and specific classroom events which were patterned, repetitive and ritualised. These were returned to participants for their comments. Finally participants were given the final case studies for further verification and to obtain their assurance anonymity had been maintained. In this way systematic cross checking between researcher-imposed and participant-generated meanings was carried out in order to provide a more valid interpretation of the data.

The data from the three major collection methods were checked and inferences were compared as a means of data source triangulation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). This process provided a validity check as well as adding depth to the descriptions.

Limitations of the Methodology

I am aware of the criticism that there is a danger for qualitative researchers to bias the data with personal prejudices and attitudes, particularly when interpretation is being used. From the outset of this study I was concerned about the fact that I was an insider, studying a familiar situation, yet at the same time an outsider in the eyes of the participants. Thus I was challenged to remain objective whilst being in a position to bring substantial knowledge and information to the study. I was keen to obtain both the emic and etic point of view, and to objectively study the subjective states of the participants. The considerable time spent in observations, in consultation with participants, collecting detailed field notes and reviewing data allowed me to constantly confront my personal opinions and perspectives and to systematically cross-check constructs with the participants.

As LeCompte and Goetz (1982) conclude, attaining absolute validity and reliability is an impossible goal for any research model, just as there can be no clear line between subjectivity and objectivity (Henry, 1992). Nevertheless, I strove for accurate accounts and for credibility within the context of my particular research goals and questions.

Interactions which occur in specific situations are complex and multifaceted and therefore observation can only have meaning for the situations in which it occurs. Hence, the notion of generalisability in qualitative research is problematic. The methods used in

this study have provided evidence which is largely situation specific and any generalisations are presented in the form of hypotheses directly related to the situation and persons studied. It is my intention to draw on the three cases represented in this study and to seek similarities and differences rather than to make the findings generalisable.

Replicability is often subjected to criticism from critics of qualitative research. The purposes and goals of qualitative research differ significantly from experimental research and therefore the likelihood that one would want to replicate a qualitative study is small. Given that the qualitative researcher is not able to manipulate or control the phenomena under investigation, in the way that an experimental researcher may, then replication is difficult. However, this does not challenge the reliability of qualitative research, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Introduction

This study investigates three classroom settings, one of which is a pre-school Montessori class and two are pre-primary classrooms affiliated with local state government primary schools. In this chapter I provide an overview of the two educational contexts in which the three classroom are set.

My familiarity with the state education system in Western Australian prompted me to go beyond the known to an organisation which offered an alternative approach to conventional schooling. Montessori education, although catering for children from pre-school to secondary school, has a particular interest in the early years of schooling and is a growing system of alternative education in Australia. As reported in Every Other Week, (an Australian child care newspaper) "the first Montessori school was established in Sydney in 1912 and today there are 91 affiliated Montessori schools in Australia" (May, 1996).

Overview

Swanleigh Montessori school, although an independent, alternative school is required to meet certain conditions set out by the Education Department of Western Australia in order to be certified and eligible for government support. Thus, the school is responsible for meeting certain standards and conditions regarding location, buildings and health and safety of the children. Most of the finances are raised through school fees and these average approximately $450 per school term for pre-school students. Working parents generally regard Montessori school as a desirable alternative to child care with the child being involved in what they regard as a sound system of education as well as receiving full time care.

The two pre-primary centres were purposefully selected as previously discussed and represent typical settings within the state government education system. Both centres are located off-site and enjoy a certain degree of autonomy regarding administration and curriculum decisions. Although the teachers are ultimately accountable to the principal of the parent primary school. The school principal at Radford, made periodic visits to the pre-primary centre, mainly on a social basis. The principal at Connor, rarely visited the pre-primary centre and relied on staff meetings at the primary school to make contact with the teacher.

The Montessori Perspective

Maria Montessori was a physician and scientist who established a school for poor children in the slums of Rome in 1907. Her educational endeavours stemmed from her work with mentally retarded children, where she undertook a project to teach a group of socially deprived children aged between three and six years. Her success led to the

establishment of *Casa dei Bambini* - the Children's House, and a philosophy and set of principles for education, which are the basis of modern day Montessori methods. The concept of the Children's House held both social and pedagogical importance, as she explicitly set up her 'school within a house' which has become the cornerstone of her philosophy. The Montessori approach to education has spread to all corners of the world and in Australia a strong following is evident and provides an alternative to the state government education system.

The Montessori World Educational Institute offers Montessori Diploma courses by external study. Three main areas are covered by the external program; study of theory; study of Montessori practice through planned workshops; and supervised practice in a Montessori classroom. Each external student is allocated a tutor who works closely with the student, answering questions, offering suggestions and providing assistance through the study guide material where needed.

In the study of the theory underlying the Montessori approach the student comes to an understanding of how children grow, develop and learn, and how they come to be self reliant, independent and socially competent and mature. The workshop sessions are designed to teach students how to present and use the Montessori materials and to develop skills in classroom management and observing children. The Montessori Society of Western Australia (Inc.) has as its primary function, to assist those interested in Montessori theory and practice. It is committed to the propagation, appreciation and support for Montessori ideals and those institutions which uphold them. The Society works to enhance the profile and professional acceptance of Montessori education within the community.

The basic Montessori concepts have been well documented as the educational approach has moved in and out of favour over the years. Wakin (1966) summarises the

three central themes as; the teaching relating to the individual needs of the child; the child working at his or her own pace in an environment which is controlled and planned to provide the means for learning; and teaching materials which are the vehicle for learning and which are self correcting thus making the child self reliant.

Maria Montessori was a maturationist and believed that heredity and the 'biological destiny' of the child would determine growth and development, with environmental factors playing a secondary role. She therefore, viewed education as a fundamental aspect in the formation of human beings and developed a teaching philosophy and method of her own (Knudsen-Lindauer, 1987). The Montessori method was reflected through the apparatus specifically developed and Maria Montessori envisaged that through this apparatus children could educate themselves (Montessori 1964). Placed in the hands of a teacher who knew how to use it, the apparatus became an efficient means of pedagogy. Montessori saw her methods as "education for life and the teacher's role was to awaken and stir the spirit, in order that the child could embrace the beauty and strength of life" (Montessori, 1964, p. 37).

Montessori placed considerable importance on the environment, and typically, Montessori classrooms are aesthetically pleasing and give an impression of precision and orderliness in the arrangement. The environment is clean, neat and pristine and there is a sense of preparedness. The furniture is the correct size for children and all the equipment although 'real' is adapted for the child. When the children are present there is a feeling of 'controlled chaos' as each child quietly goes about their work. The children sit at desks or work on the floor, with work areas specifically designated. Every child pursues his or her individual task according to interest and level of development. School, for Maria Montessori was, "a field for scientific experimental pedagogy and child psychology" (Montessori, 1964, p. 72). Montessori conducted carefully detailed and recorded

observations of the children and the environment, and these were used as the basis of the development of her materials and method.

Maria Montessori advocated that the child should be self disciplined, self motivated and self reliant. She expected the teacher to respond to the child's readiness to learn and to be available to guide and encourage but not to intrude or interfere. She expected the child to be disciplined in a way that showed mastery of self regulation in situations where it was necessary to follow rules. Rules or limits were set in place for the good of the collective. According to Montessori (1964) self motivation was developed through the abolition of external forms of rewards and incentives and she postulated that "human power was born from within" (p. 104).

Despite the long history of the Montessori method of education, with its waves of both popularity and scepticism, it has been criticised for a number of perceived limitations. The main criticism of the system has been levelled at the narrow focus of learning which has been confined primarily to specific concepts such as size, shape, texture and the emphasis on the mastery of exercises specifically related to these concepts. In addition, other areas under scrutiny have been; the lack of opportunity for discovery learning given the didactic nature of materials designed by Montessori; the prescriptive used of these materials to teach certain concepts; the lack of creative materials designed for exploratory learning, such as blocks, easels and paints or clay; the focus on ritualised procedures for mastery of a technique or concept, rather than on the process and pleasure inherent in participation; the lack of opportunity for young children to express their feelings, through social interaction and role-playing in dramatic play situations (Beyer, 1966).

Pre-primary Education: A Western Australian Perspective

In Western Australia there are two contrasting schools of thought regarding the aims, role and function of pre-primary education (5 year olds). These can be viewed as being situated along a continuum. One perspective is that which is aligned with the push for accountability and the use of 'student outcome statements' as a means of measuring and evaluating student learning. This perspective emphasises a more teacher-centred and academic approach with the principal objective being 'readiness' for the first year of compulsory schooling. The contrasting perspective is a child-centred approach based on the principles of "developmentally appropriate practice" (Bredekamp 1987). This approach emphasises choice, with play as a central activity and is based on the premise that children develop to their own potential at their own rate. This perspective places play at the centre of young children's learning and at the centre of the curriculum. Generally, pre-primary teachers in WA find a blend of these two approaches and are influenced by the local situation and conditions, outside influences such as the school principal and colleagues, their personal practical knowledge and philosophical beliefs and values about working with young children.

Historically, early childhood education in WA has been founded on the philosophies of Froebel and Pestalozzi. These early exponents of education for young children provided a framework based on a natural romantic approach, which emphasised the 'nurturing' of the child within a homelike environment, and attention to the importance of the child as an individual. Kindergartens established on these principles, stressed the notion of individual growth, hence a maturationist perspective dominated theory and practice.

As was the case throughout the world, by the middle of the century Piaget's theory began to have a profound effect on how educators thought about children, and

consequently, what they did in practice. Piaget emphasised the child as an active learner, constructing knowledge through interaction with their environment (McInerney & McInerney, 1994). Thus, Piaget's theory of development as a construct in early childhood education and the notion of developmentally appropriate practice has had a tremendous influence and underpins much of the practice in WA schools.

More recently the field of early childhood has experienced a further shift in perspective, with the recognition of the child as a member of a social system. Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach to cognition is providing a framework for discussion and research based on the theory that children internalise knowledge and skills through social interactions with adults and peers (Berk & Winsler 1995). In contrast to Piaget's view that children are autonomous learners dependent on their own biological maturation, Vygotsky sees children as learning through social interaction, that is, mutual engagement, where children make meaning from the experience through interaction and language (Bowman, 1993).

It is important to note, that this approach to teaching and learning forms a significant part of the rhetoric of teacher education programs in Western Australian at the present time, but is considered the 'new wave' by practitioners at the school level. Educational change, as we are well aware, is a slow process and old attitudes and habits are difficult to shift.

Unlike primary and secondary education, the notion of content of curriculum is much less clearly defined in pre-primary education. The literature (Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer, & Death, 1996; Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiran, 1993) describes at length components and processes of curriculum design, planning and implementation, but the idea of content matter to be taught has remained elusive. The integrative nature of learning and teaching in the early years has precluded content matter from being

approached as discrete subject areas. Most early childhood educators traditionally, would consider this type of organisation to result in artificial boundaries and therefore be boundaries to learning. However, at the time of writing, much work is being done in relation to curriculum development for the early years which could result in dramatic changes to early childhood curriculum. With the current emphasis on student outcome statements and the development of eight discrete learning areas, we may well see a significant trend towards highlighting subject matter as a key component of curriculum.

At present, the content of the pre-primary program; the knowledge, understandings, skills, concepts, attitudes and dispositions to be learned are integrated and presented in the form of learning centres in which children plan and select activities and where opportunities exist for spontaneous learning through play and experimentation. The early childhood curriculum has been described as, content as it happens reinforcing the importance of the spontaneous element of learning and teaching and the principles of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987) as central philosophical components. In such an approach the child becomes the central focus and the teacher prepares the setting and provides the materials and experiences. Emphasis is placed on the process involved and the interaction taking place rather than the product. When content is defined, it is organised in such a way as to strongly emphasise the development of skills, processes and competencies particularly in the cognitive, social and affective domains. The belief is that children will be empowered to seek their own knowledge.

Summary

Both the Montessori and Western Australian perspectives of early childhood education described above stem from different philosophical foundations and this is reflected in practice. The major differences between the two systems are particularly

noticeable in the following areas: the degree of emphasis on social interaction; the nature of learning from equipment and materials; the importance placed on creativity; the status of play as a means of self expression; the role of the teacher. Montessori education is particularly concerned with mastery of specific sensory and spatial concepts which is a narrower view of curriculum when compared to pre-primary education. Inherent in this approach is the prescriptive use of didactic materials which are specifically designed to teach a particular concept. Whilst rules are apparent in any classroom setting, the Montessori classroom fosters a significant number of implicit rules regarding use of materials, care of the environment and procedures for working at an activity, and ways of co-existing with peers. These rules, together with the emphasis Montessori places on the individual, severely restrict opportunities for social interaction. What is another obvious difference between the two systems, is the extent to which whole group sessions are conducted. The Montessori system firstly teaches independence and self reliance with the belief that social skills and cooperation will follow. Thus there is no great need for children to come together in whole group sessions. In contrast, pre-primary teachers believe social skills form a key component of their program.

The following three chapters are case descriptions of the three teachers and their classrooms. The descriptive accounts are drawn from field notes documented during observations and from interview transcripts, personal notes and discussions held with teachers in the field. I begin with Radford Pre-Primary, and follow with Swanleigh Montessori, and Connor Pre-Primary.

CHAPTER 6

CASE STUDY ONE

Introduction

In this case I describe the first of the participants which I have called Helen. I provide some background by outlining her early experiences and view of teaching. This is followed by a description of Radford Pre-Primary; the location, classroom setting, and an outline of a typical day's activity. I then describe rituals in Radford Pre-Primary under the headings of socialising children, and the teacher as transmitter of knowledge.

Helen

Helen has been a teacher for thirty-five years. Although towards the twilight years of her career, she continues to show enthusiasm for teaching, particularly in her contact with young children. Helen found it difficult to speak to me about what she did as a teacher, most often the conversation would turn to the children, their progress and development. Despite the ease and confidence she projects when working with children, Helen was reluctant to verbalise her own practice. My perception of Helen is, that she is a gentle, softly spoken lady, who communicates warmth, encouragement and support to the children in her care and to the parents and families she contacts. Helen's appearance

is always impeccable. With her moderate heeled shoes, tailored skirt and crisp white blouse with lace collar finished with either an ornate broach or a string of pearls, she is always elegantly groomed and presented. Her appearance is more typical of a business woman in a corporate office, than a pre-primary teacher about to face twenty-seven energetic, demanding five year olds. However, that is not to say that her dress code was indicative of a remote or "hands off" style of teaching. On the contrary, I often found her sitting on the floor, or squatting on her heels to be at eye level with the children.

The quality which I find most striking about Helen is her professional commitment. This was summarised by Helen when she said, "My very strong objective in life has been to be a successful teacher. Working with children affords me a challenge in my life and challenges stimulate my teaching" (Interview #2, p2, 7/8/94).

In spite of the many uncertainties and changes facing early childhood teachers in the West Australian education system, Helen continues to meet the challenge of innovation with excitement and dedication. At a time when others might be looking forward to retirement, Helen is totally focused on her career, which in the words of her assistant, Marcia, "has become her life's work". Helen's commitment to her work and her passionate concern for the welfare of young children are reflected in how she views her role as teacher.

> They (children) come to me with a basic knowledge... and I like to extend them from where they are at. And that is part of this year in pre-primary. It's helping them to grow into happy and healthy people, which is really important. And once they're confident and the self-esteem is there, then learning will be so much easier for them. (Interview #6, p6, 5/9/94)

In her interactions with the children she is extremely positive and continually praises and fosters children's involvement and contributions. Helen communicates in low, soft, expressive tones and rarely did I hear her raise her voice beyond this level, no matter what the circumstances. She uses non-verbal techniques to express her feelings, mostly positive and she communicates that she likes being with children. Her eyes sparkle with interest and her smile conveys pleasure in her contact with the children. There is energy in her movements around the room as she works persistently with groups and individuals.

Over the years Helen has been involved in a number of innovations in relation to structure, policy and curriculum implementation. At the time of this study she was part of a team planning and preparing for the implementation of Multi-Aged Groups, a new initiative within the Education Department of Western Australia. Helen works well beyond the official hours and on several occasions I observed her car parked in the centre car-park at seven o'clock in the morning and at six o'clock in the evening. On weekends, Helen also works at the school, setting up the centre, catching up on book-work, or organising resources. Regularly her assistant is with her. Helen and her assistant have worked together as a team for fifteen years and regard each other as "best friends". During my visits to Radford, I was continually impressed by the nature of the team-work displayed by these two women. They appeared in harmony with one another. As if on cue, the poster, or teaching aid would appear within Helen's reach or the tables would be cleared and reset without a word being spoken. Such was the compatibility of this team.

Early experiences

Helen began her teaching career as an infant teacher in a small school on King Island, off the coast of Tasmania. This was followed by an appointment to a

'demonstration' school, in the metropolitan area of Hobart, a highly prestigious placement for a young teacher. In Helen's view it was here that she blossomed professionally.

> The 'demonstration' school was a great boost for my confidence. The principal was my old principal that I had had as a monitor and he was very supportive. The school was very intriguing, as you were on show almost all of the time. (Interview #1, p2, 4/8/94)

When her husband was transferred to Western Australia, Helen found herself in the remote north of the State and it was here she was approached to begin a kindergarten class. Her first classes were held under a gum tree, with few resources and very little specific training in the area of kindergarten teaching. However, Helen pays tribute to the support she received from the Pre-School Board and the professional development provided for personnel in the district. She explains,

> This taught me all I know about early childhood education. The knowledge and strategies for preparing developmental programs, the importance of child observation, and I developed skills for facilitating and being a catalyst for children's learning. These sessions encouraged me to think about theory and to read about Piaget. My background in infant teaching also helped me a lot. (Interview #1, p2-3, 4/8/94)

These early experiences resulted in what Helen regards as "a well rounded background, which has shown me where the children go and where they come from... I have been really lucky in my teaching career" (Interview #1, 4/8/94), she added.

Helen recalls developing strategies by modelling good teaching practice during her early years of teaching. For example, her experience at the demonstration school taught

her a great deal about what was regarded as good teaching practice at that time. and she received tremendous support from colleagues at the school, given that she was a junior member of staff.

For the past twenty years of her teaching career, Helen has been at Radford Pre-Primary. During this time she has seen it change in status from a community based kindergarten controlled by a parent committee, to a government pre-primary controlled by the state education department. It has grown from a sessional program, to a full time program. With these changes Helen has gone from having total autonomy, that is, teacher-in-charge, to being part of a school staff answerable to the principal and senior staff. She has nevertheless, weathered these changes in policy and practice. In light of this progress, what is remarkable is that Helen's way of doing things, the scripted dramatic forms and her decisions about program method and content, the actions and narration, have remained virtually unchanged. For one of her students it was astounding that when she returned to the scene ten years on, specific elements of what Helen was doing, and more significantly, what Helen was saying, were clearly recollected.

It is important to note that Helen is highly regarded in the profession as an exemplary teacher. She has received accolades from many sectors of the field including colleagues, parents, and administrators. This was clearly illustrated at the celebrations planned for her twentieth anniversary of teaching at Radford. The event was attended by numerous people who had been part of Helen's life over that time. Past children, parents, colleagues, school and district staff attended to pay tribute to Helen's work and to the influence she had on their lives. It was recognition of a person who had given her utmost to make children feel that coming to school was a wonderful and worthwhile experience and an exciting place to be.

View of teaching

Helen describes her priority for early childhood education as follows:

> The child should have the experience of coming into a centre and being free of any anxieties, either anxieties that may occur within the classroom or from the home. With working Mums there are a lot of pressures in the home, and I would like the children to come into the centre and have none of those pressures. To let them be happy, get on with their own little lives here in the centre, let it be the most enjoyable part for them, let it be a lovely learning experience. (Interview #1, p5, 4/8/94)

Over the years, Helen has developed her own curriculum. She has identified what she believes to be key bodies of content knowledge that are important for children to know. This she calls her 'theme work'. Working with themes is a key feature of Helen's teaching and has been for the twenty years she has been teaching at Radford. Helen uses the theme as a vehicle for her teaching and regards theme work as a key learning and teaching time in her program. The themes form a framework or ritualised pattern in that they have been carefully planned in a specific order for the school term, and in a sequenced pattern for the school year. Helen has strictly followed this order year after year with a minimum of variation. Each week a theme is introduced and developed through the various learning centres and experiences. Many of the themes are elaborate productions. For example, when the theme of "Supermarkets" is introduced, the entire centre is transformed into a realistic replica of a supermarket, complete with the full range of artefacts, including grocery products, posters, shopping trolleys, play money, and even cash registers. The theme thus enables the children to become immersed in real life experiences.

Theme work carries considerable significance for Helen. In many respects theme work has been rendered sacred by Helen. This is confirmed by the way it has remained virtually unchanged as a critical part of her program and has been reenacted over many years. Another indication of its importance is the fact that it holds a major place in the timetable and in the delivery of the planned program. Helen is most reluctant to alter or omit theme work from her plan. She describes theme work in the following way:

> I guess the children's interest provide my themes. I like to do lots of informational things with my themes. I begin with 'Myself' and lead on to 'Community Workers', the family members going out into the community, this is an interest for the children. The International Themes look at the multiculturalism in our society. I do it to support the families. Then we finish with Christmas. A lot is me talking and I guess all the children are listening. But later on in the week I will recall the facts and general knowledge. (Interview #7, p1-2, 24/10/94)

In addition, Helen's curriculum strongly emphasises the development of social and personal skills. She strives to make children "pro-social" and to develop skills of consideration for others, kindness and cooperation. In this way, Helen attempts to build a sense of community within her centre. Her personal philosophy of early childhood education revolves around her view of a "sharing and caring" environment. Building positive relationships in the classroom along with a sense of harmonious fellowship is a key concern for Helen and her staff. There is an overt display of affection between adults and children and a sense that the children occupy prime position in this centre.

The routines and rituals at Radford Pre-Primary have been developed over many years and have become a distinctive feature of Helen's teaching. There is a sameness

about the way things are done. After years of implementing a successful recipe for teaching, reinforced by commendation from all sections of the field, Helen is encouraged to continue with her successes. Years of experience have resulted in stylised behaviours, based on what Helen considers is important for young children to know and these are acted out in more or less invariant sequences of action. The direction Helen takes is guided by certain "truths" she holds of early childhood teaching, that is, her knowledge, values and beliefs about the social world, about what is good for young children, and about the principles she holds for early childhood education.

The physical appearance of the centre is of paramount importance to Helen and consequently she spends an inordinate amount of time aesthetically preparing the environment. Helen arrives at school as early as 7.00 o'clock in the morning specifically to organise and structure her learning environment. She has clearly defined ideas of how the centre should look and what is to be exhibited. Her personal touch is unmistakable in the way children's work is arranged and displayed. The centre is Helen's personal show piece. She takes pride in its appearance.

When discussing her teaching, Helen articulates a strong view that teaching young children should be informal and that children should have freedom to pursue their own interests. From an early childhood perspective, however, the degree of child-centredness in its true sense is questionable. Helen's program leans more towards the formal end of the continuum. There is a formality to the structure of the program and to the procedures and experiences chosen by Helen and more particularly, the way she manages the routines.

With the increased emphasis on student learning outcomes and accountability, Helen feels more pressure to get children ready for school. The school system requires formal reporting to parents and this has resulted in a set of practices previously not

regarded as a central component of pre-primary procedure. Recent shifts in policy have resulted in pre-primary education being regarded as the first year of schooling (albeit non-compulsory), thus putting in place a set of expectations for both Helen and the children. Despite this position, Helen declares she does not feel pressure to have the children at a certain standard for the year one teacher, rather she describes her primary aim as:

> to make sure the child is happy and feels safe and secure within the environment. That's my big thing I suppose. Then I like to pick up the children's weaknesses and also know their strengths, so I can encourage them knowing their strengths, encourage them to overcome their weaknesses. (Interview #1, p5, 4/8/94)

Another key aim for Helen is "looking for ways to lay foundations for healthy personalities" (Interview #7, p6, 24/10/94).

Helen prefers teaching at the pre-primary level. Her reasons include, "I love the children; they are really honest; they are like a sponge and they will absorb anything that you give them and that's what makes it so rewarding" (Interview #1, p3, 4/8/94). When discussing the changes to the education system over time, she expresses excitement about the innovations taking place. Helen has always held a strong objective in life to be a successful teacher and has derived great enjoyment and satisfaction from her work. She considers herself a "carer and nurturer" and describes herself as taking a "quiet and concerned interest in the welfare and progress of all her students". For Helen a top priority is the pastoral care she can offer the children in her custody. She outlines her strengths as "being patient, well prepared and sympathetic" (Interview #2, p1, 7/8/94), and endeavours to earn the trust and respect of both parents and children. Helen sees herself as a committed and hard working professional. She enjoys the challenges teaching presents and appears very comfortable with her role as teacher, describing

herself as "an enthusiast rather than an expert". She is confident that what she does is effective and beneficial for the children and holds herself accountable for the development and progress of every child and to this end makes herself readily available for scrutiny.

The Setting: Radford Pre-Primary

Radford Pre-Primary is part of the local primary school system, but is located off site within a short walking distance to the school. In this regard the centre enjoys a certain amount of autonomy and independence. The centre caters for four full days of schooling for five year olds, with the fifth day being designated a non-contact preparation day for the teacher and assistant. Over the past twenty years the centre has changed status from a community-based kindergarten to a pre-primary centre attached to the local primary school and controlled by the Education Department of Western Australia. Radford is located in a middle socio-economic suburb in the northern metropolitan area and the children represent a very homogeneous group in terms of social and economic status, and cultural background.

The building is leased from the local council by the Education Department. Radford Pre-Primary is situated adjacent to a large open playing field and this gives a certain feeling of spaciousness. The building was built specifically for the purpose of pre-school education, and is roomy and well designed. An outdoor play area surrounds two sides of the building and this is marked by a high fence which forms a secure boundary around the centre. The entrance to the centre is through a side gate. The verandah is a well used extension of the building, and provides a sheltered work area in all seasons of the year. A bulletin board for public notices intended for parents is by the door-way, whilst at the children's eye-level an easel carries a message each day for the children.

Inside, the centre is divided into a number of smaller play and work areas by large mats and various pieces of furniture. On entering the centre the traditional work areas and learning centres such as the home corner, block play, construction area, mat area, puzzles and book corner are easily identified. The large central space is set up with a number of small tables and chairs in readiness for prescribed activities which Helen calls 'graphic work'. A scan of the centre provides powerful evidence of the work being carried out. Children's work is a strong feature of the centre and the walls are draped with their latest efforts. Even the ceiling drips with art and craft work, and every section of the floor space seems to have a designated purpose. An initial reaction upon entering the centre is to pause and take in the visual stimulation. Despite the initial impact the centre is neat and systematic. There is an abundance of high quality materials, equipment and resources, which you would expect to find in pre-primary centres, all carefully placed in a precise and orderly fashion ready for the children's use.

The structured table top activities which form an important part of Helen's curriculum and which she calls 'graphic work', are set out in a precise and organised manner and maintained in this way primarily through the efforts of Marcia, the teacher assistant. The children are not given responsibility for the upkeep of the centre, rather Marcia packs away, cleans and tidies after the children, and maintains a steady supply of appropriate materials for them and for Helen. 'Graphic work' includes drawing, cutting, colouring, gluing and making. Generally, the activities relate very closely to the theme of the week, and are teacher directed and carefully structured by Helen. There is little evidence of individual creativity in the work completed by the children. Although Helen says she encourages individual interpretation, in most cases the children merely reproduce the model, or complete the worksheet by following specific instructions.

The hub of the centre is the green mat. This is located immediately inside the doorway. It is a carpeted area with clearly defined boundaries which make it a sheltered, confined space, although large enough to accommodate the whole group comfortably. This is a traditional place which can be found in any pre-primary centre. The green mat is permanently set aside for Helen to assemble the whole group. At Radford, the mat is a symbol of unity and of community. It is the 'stage', the primary site where Helen constructs a context for engaging the children in her teaching. The children know that once assembled, Helen will take the centre stage to conduct the proceedings, and that a certain degree of attention and controlled behaviour will be expected. Helen describes the mat as "a place for gathering, a place for acknowledging and welcoming the children" (Interview #3, p6, 15/8/94).

In many respects Radford Pre-Primary is typical of pre-primary settings. For Helen, it is a home, away from home for the children. She is very conscious of making it a safe and protected haven for the children. Helen declares, "the organisation of my centre is of paramount importance to me" (Interview #2, p2 7/8/94).

A Typical Day

I visited Helen's centre on 24 occasions. I would arrive with the hordes of parents leading their children through the side gate into the confines of the centre. Some parents would linger, others would be rushing to meet commitments. All, nevertheless, conscientiously accompanied their children across the verandah and through the door into the centre to personally greet the teacher. During these visits I would remain on the periphery until Helen had completed the formalities of welcoming the children and greeting the parents. Once the official proceedings commenced I sat on the edge of the group with my note pad on my knee. Close by me would be the parent helper for the day

and any visitor who happened to be present. We were always formally introduced to the children and over a period of time the children came to accept and indeed anticipate, me as a regular visitor to the centre. During activity time I mingled with the children and took on the role of helper. At these times notes were taken at intervals as I moved from one group to the next or as I waited for the children to come to me.

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The message on the easel reads "Today we have a new boy, his name is Cameron. We will need to make him feel welcome." As groups of children and parents arrive at the doorway they pause to read this message of the day. The parents have been encouraged to share the act of reading the message with the children and together they slowly sound out the letters to decode the text. Inside the centre the children are greeted by the teacher. Helen hugs each child and crouching down on her haunches, she makes a personal comment: "I see you have a new blue bag, Damien", "You've had a haircut Jason", "I like your hair band Sally; you look very smart". The greeting is relatively brief, yet warm and personal and as the children congregate Helen acknowledges as many as possible and makes herself available to parents should they want her attention. The 'real' greeting of the children will occur when all have gathered and assembled on the mat. The scene is noisy and somewhat chaotic, the centre is crowded with parents milling about, some talking in small groups, catching up on social events, others sitting with their children at an activity or waiting for a 'quick word' with Helen. The children energetically go about their business of organising their possessions and choosing an activity to complete, whilst enthusiastically pointing out accomplishments and various features of their work to anyone who will listen. Gradually, most parents begin to drift away. Without any signal, the children begin to make their way to the assembly area, the green mat.

The day always begins on the green mat. It is the commencement of a string of daily events that have become patterned and rhythmic for Helen. The events correspond to a particular day of the week, and this pattern is repeated week after week, in a cyclic fashion. What is more, the structure of the yearly program is something Helen has cultivated over many years of teaching, and when I conducted observations a year apart, little if any, variations to the actual content and performance were observed.

The green mat is a place where the children congregate under the watchful eye of Helen. It is where Helen develops her sense of a "sharing and caring" community, "where children can feel safe and secure" and where she builds strong interpersonal relationships. The dominant activity on the mat is interaction, where Helen and the children become involved in discussing, questioning, listening, speaking, and explaining. Helen sits on a small child-sized chair and gathers the group in very close to her. The children sit cross legged, randomly spaced with the inevitable jostling for front position. There is a quiet hush and Helen begins in a low whispering voice, calling for the attention of the group. There is no overt mention of rules, yet rules are implicit in Helen's use of voice and gestures and her carefully chosen words when gathering the children and gaining attention. Helen explains mat time in the following way:

> I guess I like the children to be together to begin with. I like to greet them . The greeting sets the mood for the day... I have a roll call to acknowledge everyone. I do my language activities. We also have our music time. (Interview #3, p1-2, 15/8/94)

> I also tell them what is available, what is new as its always changing. To let the children know exactly what's going to happen during the day I need to explain this, explain about the different activities and to talk about the theme. Mat time is when I do my theme work, I use the whole group to introduce something new. This is where I also teach them

things like taking turns and listening to one another. (Interview #5, p2, 29/8/94)

During mat time the children are involved in a collection of activities and experiences carefully scripted by Helen and aided by Marcia. The activities incorporate a formal greeting of every child by way of a roll call, where each individual is called, acknowledged, noted and commented upon. A "star person" for the day is selected and honoured and the date and weather are discussed and recorded. Coming events are announced and special program features are highlighted. All these events occur in brisk fashion and in the patterned format which remained consistent and unchanged for the period of observation. However, it seemed to me as though these activities were the supporting act to the main attraction, which was the theme work.

Each week a theme is introduced, developed and investigated. It was this component of Helen's program which had been so recognisable to the visiting high school student ten years later. The teaching session is content driven and Helen becomes a transmitter of knowledge as she imparts a body of knowledge which she deems important for the children to know.

> I want the children to build background knowledge so they can make connections in other situations. I think children are not exposed to general knowledge as much as I would like. We find out about things, like science, about society, and multiculturalism. I want to develop social responsibility and children being caring and sharing and accepting each other. (Interview #7, p3, 24/10/94)

For the rest of the week, there will be follow up sessions with table-top activities related to the theme, all designed to extend the content knowledge of the theme. The children

listen attentively to Helen's delivery and occasionally interrupt the teacher's flow with a comment, question or to give a personal account. Helen expertly deals with these interjections. She does not require children to put their hands up to speak, rather she uses her voice, expertly altering the volume and tone to indicate her expectations and occasionally having to resort to "it's my turn" to bring children back to full attention. The children show great ability to sit and concentrate for considerable lengths of time, and this is indicative of the style and skill of Helen's delivery. The presentation resembles a monologue, although punctuated by children's comments, thoughts and asides which are acknowledged by Helen and worked skilfully into the performance. The entire event is over in fifteen minutes, but in that time Helen has covered a substantial body of content, which will be recalled and further developed throughout the week with other mat discussions and activity work.

From the mat, the children are dismissed in an orderly fashion to complete the table top activities. Whilst the children have free choice of all the activities and learning centres arranged for the day, there is an expectation that most children will complete the table top activities at some time throughout the week and this is closely monitored by both Helen and Marcia, and followed up as required. Helen calls the table top activities 'graphic work' and explains it as, "the creative work, it includes everything they do at tables and more, like play dough, paintings, cutting out... their creativity" (Interview #3, p1, 15/8/94). The activities are prescriptive and formalised, either presenting a model for children to follow or a worksheet where children cut and colour and paste. Once the table top activities have been completed the children move on to the free choice activities which are predominantly manipulation and discovery materials.

Activity time is an energetic, vibrant period of the day. The children are self motivated, and move freely and confidently throughout the centre obviously familiar with the procedures, expectations and requirements. Helen moves about from group to group,

and spends a considerable amount of time with various individuals in a one-to-one teaching situation whilst Marcia works constantly clearing away, packing up and setting up new materials. Rarely do discipline problems occur. Conflicts which do arise are minor and these are quickly sorted out. On one occasion I observed Helen moving quickly to a child who had initiated a confrontational situation, and with her arm wrapped around the child moved him aside from the group calming him in a quiet speaking voice. In a brief minute the child returned to the group as if the problem had not existed. I never heard Helen raise her voice above a speaking tone or call out across the room.

In the midst of activity time the morning tea table appears, set up by Marcia and the parent helper, complete with table cloth and bowls of fruit. There is no formal break in the proceedings and the children drift to the table and take up a place when they are ready. They take their mug from the shelf and sit at the table with friends. As a position becomes vacant another comes to take the place. The group is small and the chatter is informal, interspersed with giggling and laughter. As they finish they move to the bathroom and then take up a position on the mat, where Helen is waiting with a range of story books. In small groups, pairs or individually, the children take a book and quietly sit and wait for everyone to finish morning tea in readiness for outdoor play. It is a very spontaneous gathering, there is no signal nor instruction for children to proceed to the mat. The gathering is a time of transition, a lull in the morning's activity and the routine has become formalised so it forms part of the stable structure of the organisation of the day. This time is a winding down time for children and Helen is often asked to read a story which frequently ends up with the whole group slowly gravitating towards her to listen eagerly and attentively.

The momentum picks up with outdoor play and the area becomes a hive of activity. The rule for outdoor play is, "no hat, no play". The children line up at the edge of the verandah, ready for Helen to explain the obstacle course for the day, the only

compulsory activity imposed by her. Once the children have completed a turn through the course, they are free to play on any of the apparatus. The outdoor play area is richly resourced with an extensive range of equipment, and various materials. The large covered sand pit turns into an engineer's delight, as spades, buckets, pipes, hoses and various materials are used to produce elaborate waterways; to build, measure, construct and experiment. At the other end of the yard children climb trees as well as the structured apparatus and others play with balls or hoops, or are at the water trolley experimenting with containers and funnels and coloured water. The outdoor program is an extension of the indoor program for the children and Helen goes to great lengths to ensure the outdoor area is an enriched learning environment for the children. For the children it is a time to let off steam, to initiate their own experiences and to relish the freedom of choice and experimentation.

The bell signals the end of outdoor play, and the children prepare for lunch. After the preparations, which includes the bathroom routine, they assemble for lunch either on the green mat, the verandah or under a tree, depending on the weather conditions. Lunch is a quiet time and Helen shares this time with the children. The children sit in random order, and chat informally as they eat their lunch. Generally, the children bring lunch from home, but on Mondays they are able to order it through the school canteen. When all have finished, there is a period of free play, where children continue their outdoor games.

The afternoon session is a far less structured time, although the nature of the materials set out, do in themselves provide some structure for the children. Once inside, the children have a quiet time in the form of reading, resting on comfortable cushions and with soft classical music in the background. Occasionally Helen will have a video for the children to watch. The activities which follow are generally an extension of the morning's free choice experiences, with additional construction and manipulative

materials and equipment. According to Helen these activities are more self initiated, free play activities and less pressured compared to the morning's schedule. The children are free to wander and to become engaged in something of interest. Groups of children play board games together and generally the climate is relaxed and there is a less hurried atmosphere in the centre. Helen often takes this opportunity to focus on the needs of individual children and she can usually be found sitting on the floor playing games, or guiding children through experiences. Eventually, without any obvious fanfare, the children gather on the mat, and Helen begins to wrap up the day's proceedings.

Gathered once more on the green mat Helen begins the final session by discussing the children's achievements for the day. She has a number of examples of work completed, and comments about several children's efforts and contributions, and praises others for their behaviour. This is also a time for distributing newsletters or notices to parents. Whilst these formalities are being attended to Marcia is involved in the final clearing away, tidying up and putting the centre in order for the next day.

As a finale, while waiting for parents to arrive, Helen shares a story with the children. She chooses a big book which lends itself to participation by the children and expertly reads the story to the children, who become totally engrossed. As the parents gradually enter, they quietly sit around the fringe of the group listening and waiting. When the story is completed, Helen takes her "magic mirror" and looking through it, begins to dismiss the children to the waiting parents. "Peter, bye bye it's time for you to go, see you tomorrow". Peter makes his way to the bathroom to collect his bag and then moves to meet his mother. Slowly one by one all the children are dismissed in this manner.

For Helen and Marcia the day is far from over. Helen will be at the centre on most days until 5.30pm and sometimes 6.00pm. When all the children have been dismissed, Helen and Marcia trace the days happenings over a cup of coffee. They make

specific comments about individual children and note their progress and development. A great portion of the assessment and evaluation task is completed at these sessions after school. The degree of involvement of children is recorded and gaps or areas of need are highlighted for future planning. To round off the day, final plans for the coming session are checked and confirmed and the centre is left in perfect order.

Rituals in Radford Pre-Primary

Helen's teaching is carefully planned and skilfully executed and her routines and procedures have become firmly entrenched over the span of her teaching career.
At the beginning of the year Helen introduces and monitors what she describes as "systems and routines". "I check to see if the child copes with the systems and routines of pre-primary. I focus on establishing required routines and introduce limits so we can have a free flowing working environment" (Interview #8, p1, 14/2/95).

Helen has developed a successful recipe for teaching, based on a body of personal knowledge, convictions and meanings, that has arisen from practical and professional experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Helen's past experiences have helped to form her personal practical knowledge base which in turn influences the choices she makes, and the way she operates. Furthermore, the recognition she receives encourages her to sustain and repeat her recipe. The successful formula influences decisions about what is important for young children and these are acted out in more or less invariant sequences of actions.

Helen recognises that her teaching practice is patterned, repetitive and perfected. She sees these characteristics as providing continuity to the day's and indeed to the week's events, thus giving the children a sense of security in the predictable pattern of

classroom occurrences. She believes that the sequence of these events offer children stability and a certain degree of order and organisation.

> If there was no type of structure I would be lost. Also I want them to experience certain things, so I need to have some sort of structure. (Interview #10, p2, 15/3/95)

> I establish my routines at the beginning of the year and they become a very important part of my teaching. An important part is the continuity, so the children can find that there is a continuous pattern because these children love to be able to predict, and know what is going to happen. They would know that there is security and that there is a boundary and that certain things were going to happen... so the continuity and predicability is important. For me?... Well I need to know where I'm going. It provides a framework for my teaching and I can build around it. (Interview #5, p1-2, 15/8/94)

Helen strongly adheres to the principles of predictability and stability which she systematically offers the children. Moreover, the pattern of Helen's yearly curriculum plan depicts a tightly structured formula built up and repeated year after year. At Radford Pre-Primary, traditional events now form a recurrinng part of Helen's program. She and the children celebrate special events, such as Father's Night, Christmas, and Birthdays and these occupy a high status in Helen's curriculum. Moreover, there is very little digression from the overall structure of daily, weekly and yearly events and from my observations one year later, the same themes, content, messages and artefacts were being presented to the new group of students. Where variation does occur, it does so within the structured, daily events where special ways of doing things have become personalised for Helen.

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Arrival and Greeting: The children enter by the side gate accompanied by an adult and together they make their way across the verandah to the doorway. The children are never left at the gate; instead the adult accompanying, usually a parent or relative, enters the classroom and makes his or her farewell from inside the centre. At the doorway to the classroom the pair stop and read the message displayed on the notice board. This reading of the notice board is the first 'school activity' the children encounter for the day. It is presented as a novel experience each day and successfully gains the children's interest and acts as a transition; a rite of passage into the life of the classroom.

On most days the function of the message is extended during mat time, where the board is brought inside by Marcia and placed beside Helen's chair. Here the written text is explored, letter sounds are discussed, conventions of print commented on and various other components of language are developed. For Helen this has become a formalised activity which has a particular pedagogical purpose for her and the children are drawn into the meaningful performance.

Once inside, parents congregate in the centre. They stand around in groups chatting amongst themselves or with Helen, while they wait for their child to settle into school mode. Helen tends to locate herself close to the mat area, and from this position has a vantage point over the doorway and is able to greet children and parents as they enter. She greets and welcomes individuals with particular personal comments and hugs and cuddles the children as they move through the room. From this point Helen begins the process of gauging the emotions, moods and temperament of individuals. Throughout the welcoming, Helen's facial expressions are animated and vivacious as she communicates warmth, concern and interest in the child and the parent whilst

endeavouring to foster and maintain personal social relationships. At all times her eyes scan the group and take in the happenings as she gradually circulates making her way to the centre of the mat area. It is a busy scene, as parents approach for a quick word and children vie for her attention. As the centre begins to fill, children are scattered in all areas of the room playing with equipment, connecting with friends, or proudly showing parents what they can do. Without any apparent warning or signal the children slowly begin to congregate on the mat where Helen has positioned herself, quietly talking to those assembled and waiting for stragglers. This move to congregate becomes a signal for the parents to leave, and although it is understood that they are quite welcome to stay for as long as they like, the majority quietly move out and make their departure. As the number of children sitting on the mat swells only few parents remain, and generally by the formal beginning of mat time, only the designated parent helper for the day is left.

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The children's and parents' performance of 'coming to school' did not vary throughout my time at Radford. Indeed, I would be very surprised if this performance was not repeated with all its detail in most pre-primary or early childhood settings no matter where it was located in the world. Depositing, settling, detaching and leaving young children is a practice which has acquired traditional status. At Radford, the ritual remained constant with the children and parents being involved in a familiar course of action.

From the time the children entered the side gate, to the formal greeting on the mat, Helen worked to familiarise herself with the emotional and temperamental state of all children, "in order to tune in to how the child is for the day " and to ascertain "social, emotional and physical needs which will set the tone for the day for that child" (Interview #4, p1, 22/8/94). In addition she explained her greeting as, "it makes the children feel

needed, wanted and loved and I think these are important things in a pre-primary and in our adult lives so I like to foster those" (Interview #4, p1, 22/8/94). The arrival and greeting was a period of transition, in that the children moved from the 'home-state' to the 'school-state' and symbolised the official handing over of the children to the teacher's care. Thus arrival time at Radford, represented a typical, traditional, institutionalised ritual, which remained virtually invariant

Socialising children

For Helen, early childhood education is about socialising children to be part of a cohesive group. She is primarily concerned with carrying on the socialisation process which has begun for these children before they enter her classroom.

> I've found that children who come to me have already had their start from play group and 4 year old kindy, and they can come in and get on with it. They do not have separation anxieties. And I'm sure that children do not grow up in isolation in any case, they have their groups of friends, their churches, their families and grandparents etc. Children's feelings are shaped by these groups I feel, and I mentioned before, I talk a lot about self concept and self esteem because I feel that how children feel about themselves comes into socialisation... and I spend a lot of time with the children on that (self concept and self esteem) and I think that is important because as teachers we are looking for ways to lay foundations for healthy personalities. (Interview #7, p1-2, 31/10/94)

Helen expresses her primary aim as, "I want to make sure the child is happy, safe and secure within the environment, that's my big thing". To this end her philosophy is that pre-primary should be a "caring, sharing environment where I can help the children grow

into happy and healthy people". Helen's practice conveys a number of scripted patterns of procedures that support and transmit this message.

Star Person: One of Helen's procedures is the election of a 'Star Person' for the day. Helen is emphatic that each child must have a turn to be chosen for this role of responsibility. To this end she nominates the person for the day and works her way through the whole group. When all have had a turn she begins again with a second turn for the year. At the morning mat time, Helen takes the silver glittering star and nominates a class member. "Today Stephanie is our star person". Everyone breaks into spontaneous clapping for Stephanie, and her name card is pinned to the star which is suspended from the ceiling. Her name will remain until the next person takes on the role. Primarily the 'star person' is the class leader, and is given the responsibility for helping with minor problems which may occur, for example if someone is upset or hurt, then the 'star person' will try to help and comfort and will notify the teacher or assistant if necessary. Helen has devised this procedure to ensure that each child is acknowledged in some special way, and the enactment of the ritual is an assurance that no individual is overlooked, whilst providing a means of spreading the contact across the whole group. Helen maintains that this formal enactment recognises that "all children are important as individuals and are not just part of a whole group". "Most importantly it helps with self concept and self respect" (Interview #7 p7, 24/10/94) adds Helen.

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What is apparent from this ritual is the commitment Helen has to building a notion of community within her classroom. The ritual of 'star person' becomes a confirmation of Helen's concern for the individual and how that individual feels as part of the group. This set of actions is a deliberate attempt by Helen to address her strongly held view that all children should feel special and that specific actions should be taken to develop

children's positive self esteem. Thus she incorporates this personalised ritual as part of her repertoire of teaching, as a way of fulfilling personal goals and intentions.

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Roll call: Children's names have been carefully printed and attractively displayed on a large chart and this occupies a prominent position on the pin up board behind the teacher's chair. As the children settle on the mat and full attention is gained, Helen begins her mat session which will formally open the business of the day. She stands with a pointer in her hand and begins to briskly go down the chart reading each name and waiting for the child to respond. She makes a personal comment to several of the children, especially if they have been away. "Jarrod is with us today, glad to have you back with us, let's welcome Jarrod everyone". The children loudly clap Jarrod to welcome him back to school. When Helen reaches the name of an absentee, she comments, "Katie? We are thinking of Katie, she has been away for two days". Helen varies this ritual primarily to extend its potential as a teaching technique. On some days Helen will begin at different points on the chart, in order to give children a sense of equity or she will suggest modifications which add a new dimension in terms of the children's learning. For example, with the arrival of the new class member Cameron, a problem presented itself when there was no room on the chart for his name. The dilemma was discussed and solutions were called for by Helen. After an extended, spontaneous debate the alternatives were considered and a final consensus was reached and the problem was solved. In this case the solution was a joint effort negotiated by the children and the teacher. On another occasion the teacher suggested small tags with the word 'yes' on one side and 'no' on the other, to indicate those children who were present and those who were absent.

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Helen uses the formal greeting on the mat to communicate her messages of "sharing and caring". The roll call orchestrated by Helen serves a number of purposes for her and for the children. It fosters a certain culture in her classroom and promotes a way of doing that is particular to this group. It promotes her ideal of children being cared for and of fostering their self worth through recognition and positive affirmation. The roll call reinforces the building of relationships which is a key issue for Helen. She works hard at being approachable and at making the children feel comfortable and settled in their environment. Helen's format for roll call varies as she exploits the possibilities of the activity to fulfil further intentions. In this way she works within the ritual of roll call and the various structures become vehicles for doing and learning.

Morning tea: A ritual which is firmly entrenched in the context of pre-primary is that of morning tea (fruit time or snack time). At Radford, morning tea is not the usual circle time with all activities coming to a halt as children partake of the snack. Rather, Helen has structured morning tea as an ongoing part of the morning activities with the intention that it blends with the regular program. However, this period does provide a transition for the children, and signifies a change of pace in the tempo of the morning's program as children will be moved from one component of the schedule to the next. Quite unobtrusively, yet at the prescribed time, Marcia sets the morning tea table for five children at a time. Children come to the table when they are ready and as they approach the table they take their personal mug of water from the shelf which is labelled with their respective names. On the table are bowls of fruit, cut into small pieces and neatly arranged by Marcia or a parent helper if available. In the next half hour, the children will come to morning tea in a steady stream. Some will line up and wait for a space to become vacant at the table, while others continue with their work until they feel the need for food. At the table it is informal and casual and children actively partake in small-talk on a range of topics which include personal matters, home or family matters and school matters.

Because of the size of the group, all children become involved in the conversations and the climate is relaxed with much laughter and enjoyment. Most often, the children have an assortment of fruit, except for special occasions, when someone celebrates a birthday, or the class has been involved in cooking activities. Morning tea lasts for only five to ten minutes for each child and when children have finished they make their way to the bathroom and finally assemble on the mat to quietly read books until all have been through the process. There are no signals, no bells, or commands, yet the children can read the implicit signals which tell them where to go and what comes next.

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For Helen, morning tea facilitates social interaction. "At morning tea there is a lot of socialising that goes on and the children can sit and have chats about what they have done and what is going to happen". Helen's intention for morning tea is to help make children "self regulated" in that they choose when they want to partake. "I don't stop children from completing an activity to come to morning tea. They come when they are ready, and this routine suits my style of teaching" (Interview #8, p4, 14/2/95). Morning tea is a traditional ritual in early childhood settings, yet Helen has modified the format and procedure in order to meet particular purposes within her program.

Teacher as transmitter of knowledge

Themes have been planned and arranged in a particular order in the yearly program to satisfy Helen's overall aims of her program, that is, to develop concepts of self, the community and the wider world and to impart a body of facts and concepts which she regards as useful for children to know. From the broad themes, topics are chosen on a weekly basis and presented in a traditional expository approach. The major topics are interspersed with key culturally significant events which are celebrated in grand

fashion, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas, Easter, and Birthdays. Each week a new topic is covered with the introduction occurring on Monday and the remainder of the week used for reinforcing facts and concepts through planned activities. This pattern represents an outline of Helen's yearly and weekly program and provides a macro view of her work at Radford. Helen has worked this way for many years and the topics chosen have remained a constant part of her program during this time. Consequently, a key role which Helen assumes in the context of the classroom, is that of transmitter of knowledge.

Theme work: During the delivery of the theme Helen embarks on an exposition of the content which pours forth with a sense of urgency and is absorbed by the children who she describes as, "being like sponges". The facts and knowledge about the topic, in this instance Germany, are accompanied by the use of many artefacts and visual aids which Helen has collected over time. A pin-up board contains pictures and photographs of various aspects of the country and culture. These include cities, traditional costumes, food, features of the geography and festivals typically celebrated. Samples of books, traditional clothing and memorabilia cover a near-by table. Throughout the presentation Helen makes reference to these visual stimuli as she tells her story about Germany. It is a travelogue, although punctured by children's spontaneous comments, thoughts and elaborations which are acknowledged and worked into the fifteen minute presentation with great skill. Helen stands at the edge of the group within easy access to the pin-up board to which she refers frequently. Helen bends forward as if to be in closer contact with the group, and launches into the topic. She shows a picture of the Berlin Wall and gives a brief explanation of its history; there is mention of skiing; the alps; the Grimm Brothers and their achievements; the origin of 'kindergarten' is explained; there is a mention of motor cars such as Volkswagon and Mercedes Benz; large cities such as Berlin and Heidelberg are introduced and posters shown, all in the space of twelve to fifteen minutes. The children sit relatively attentively, although they do not hesitate to

interject. They do not put their hand up to speak, but rather call out as the urge takes them. Helen expertly deals with this. She is able to pick up on a child's comment and acknowledge it and work it into her speech. Her eyes dart around the group, as she tells her story and at the same time listening and using the children's contributions. Occasionally she puts her hand, palm up, and this signals to the children that too many are speaking at once or she may place her hand gently on the head of a child close by to signal they should wait a moment. I never heard Helen reprimand the children for calling out, nor did I witness her stopping her lesson to gain control of the group. On the odd occasion I heard her say, "It's my turn now", and this seemed to be the extent of the need to assert her dominance over the group.

In the time frame of theme work, Helen covers a substantial body of content knowledge. She regards theme work as a "key teaching and learning time" in her program and as a vehicle for her teaching. Helen is most reluctant to alter or omit theme work from her plan. This was particularly noticeable on the first day of term three. The children had just returned from vacation, and were excited about seeing their friends, and bursting with news of their holiday activities and excursions. As they gathered on the mat they were particularly excited and talkative, enthusiastically telling their individual stories, many of them with something ready to show and tell. Helen quickly acknowledged one or two comments, then launched into her presentation, "I won't keep you long today, and we will all have a turn to talk about our holiday this afternoon, but I just want to tell you about this country, you need to listen now, the country is Germany" (Field notes: 17/10/94).

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Theme work reflects Helen's personal view of what is important for the children to know and thus it becomes a way of teaching for Helen which meets her particular intentions. She explains that the themes come from the children's interest, however, it is

difficult to see how children's interests have influenced Helen's choice of themes, given that the topics have remained so constant over the years and indeed the placement of topics in the yearly program have not varied beyond a week or two.

Over the period of observation, seven countries were treated in the same manner. There was an extraordinary amount of factual knowledge presented. Helen's purpose for presenting this knowledge is, so that, "children can build general knowledge and make connections in other situations". Helen explained that, "some time in the future the children will hear more about these topics and hopefully they will be able to recall some of what they had learned" (Interview #7, p2, 24/10/94).

Given that Helen has maintained this approach to theme work for many years, and continues to value the bodies of knowledge implicit in the topics, the ritual of theme work is clearly of significant importance to Helen. She has developed her own personal curriculum including a body of knowledge which is not readily available for teachers of pre-primary, together with a pedagogy for imparting this knowledge. She has identified what she considers important and constructed a program to fulfil her needs.

Celebrations: Helen and her class celebrate a number of key culturally recognised events She has a particular ritual which she follows to honour each child's birthday. Other prominent features of her program are; Christmas, Easter, Father's Day, Mother's Day and Western Australia Week. These celebrations are for the parents benefit as well as the children. From the parents, Helen receives assistance in the form of participation and involvement, while at the same time she is acknowledged for her efforts as teacher. Personally, Helen cultivates a community spirit, as she and the children share their achievements with family members. She works to put into practice her personal theories of teaching young children and her philosophy of a 'sharing and caring environment'.

Summary

Helen's teaching was drawn from a rich store of personal knowledge and a pool of background experience and these formed the basis for her decisions and actions. Helen's personal philosophy of "sharing and caring" was the dominant theme of her program. She was guided by her values and beliefs about the social world, about what is good for young children and by the views she holds for early childhood education. Her teaching was firmly entrenched in principles of good teaching, powerful relationships and in stability and security.

With regard to the program, Helen's teaching had strong elements of structure and consistency. Over the twenty years she had been at Radford, she had put in place a framework which had remained stable and invariable. Her yearly and daily plan represented a successful formula instituted and implemented over a long period of time. This formula had become somewhat mindless for Helen, in that it was firmly entrenched and automatic so that she operated in a stylised and mechanical way. Yet, within the daily events, Helen did vary elements of ritual. She consciously modified sequences of action in order to fulfil personal goals and intentions. For example, her rituals of 'roll call' and 'star person' were constantly altered to meet objectives of personalising contact with children, affirming and acknowledging individuals, demonstrating a caring community attitude and to a lesser degree, keeping the children interested and attentive.

Helen's practice had the semblance of effortless organisation and routine and did not vary significantly over the period of observation. It was characterised by ritualised patterns of action, which became a justification and enactment of a particular instructional form and teaching procedure. For Helen ritual was a means by which she orchestrated daily life in the classroom and assigned meaning to her actions.

CHAPTER 7

CASE STUDY TWO

Introduction

In this case I describe Jean, the second of the participants. I begin with background information, and outline her early experiences and personal view of teaching. Following this section is a description of Swanleigh Montessori School, its location, the classroom setting, and an outline of a typical day's activity. I then describe rituals in Swanleigh Montessori School under the headings of socialising children, and teacher as provider and facilitator.

Jean

Jean has been the owner and head teacher of Swanleigh Montessori school for the past two years and is currently completing a Montessori Diploma. Jean's initial training was in kindergarten teaching and she describes herself as being eighty per cent Montessori and twenty per cent kindergarten. Jean acknowledges the kindergarten influence in the following manner.

> There are lots of things in the classroom that Maria Montessori would not have written about and I think they deserve to be in here. It's very comfortable for me to revert back to knindergarten because that's part of what I know. But it's a matter of balance and for me it's a confidence thing, and I am feeling more relaxed about not fitting strictly to what I think should be in a Montessori class. (Interview #6, p4-5, 25/10/94))

Jean, who is in her mid-forties, dresses for comfort. In loose fitting long skirts and tops and low flat shoes, she can be found most of the time on the floor with the children, or on a small chair huddled in a group throughout the classroom watching and noting the children's involvement. With her short neat hairstyle and natural appearance, Jean's appearance symbolises the "mother" in the Children's House, the nurturer and carer as described by Maria Montessori. Jean projects a warm and caring personality, together with a businesslike and assertive style, and these attributes are reflected in the decisive manner in which she deals with children and adults. Jean's communication with the children is positive and encouraging and although she commands a convincing physical presence in the classroom she does not dominate the environment. Her contact with the children is most often on a one-to-one level or with small groups and rarely did I witness announcements made to the whole group. Jean patrols the environment, observing and explaining to children where necessary and eventually gathering a group together for some intensive work. I had a strong sense that Jean knew when to take control and when to blend into the background.

Jean's classroom appears to run automatically. It was obvious to me that the children knew what to do and were trained to 'get on with the job'. The children have the feedom to make choices and to take responsibility for these choices and Jean aims to facilitate spontaneous action on the part of the children, rather than suffocate activity

through intrusion. Jean 'nurtures' the individual's independence and responsibility through constant guidance and support in choosing and completing tasks.

Generally, outside influences make little difference to how Jean operates, she is focused on her school and her children. However, one intrusion into Swanleigh has been the computer. Jean explained to me that Montessori was about preparing children for life, "and if computers are a significant part of our lives then children have to be ready for that" (Interview #6, p5-6, 25/10/94).

Early experiences

Jean's career began in New South Wales. She was trained as a kindergarten teacher and taught three to eight years olds for several years. Teaching seemed a logical choice of career for Jean, given her earlier involvement with children and youth at the local Sunday school.

Jean's first impressions of teaching had been formed by her high school experience. She believed that teaching involved a high level of teacher control. However, this was modified and changed by her experiences during her teacher training course. Jean recounted to me that she was particularly influenced by a practice teacher who "opened her eyes to the delight of working with younger children" (Interview #1, p2, 2/8/94), and this, together with the teacher training course ignited a love of working with young children. Up until this time Jean had believed that young children 'did not do a great deal' and now she thought she could make a difference, and wanted to do something "real".

For a period of ten years, after her husband was transferred interstate, Jean worked at a range of occupations interspersed with periods of relief teaching. However,

the relief teaching exposed her to a wide range of programs and situations, not all of which had been satisfying experiences. Jean told me how she slowly became disillusioned by the education system. How her impression of the state system of early childhood education was that teachers tended to underestimate children's potential and capabilities, thus not challenging children. These experiences influenced Jean to make a decision that she did not want to make a commitment to a full time teaching career in the state system.

An interest in Montessori began with Jean's own daughter. When her daughter was three years of age, Jean began looking for, "something beyond the traditional" to meet her daughter's needs. Being an only child Jean was searching for what she described as "a really good quality playgroup program. I was looking beyond what was being traditionally offered" (Interview #1, p3, 2/8/94), something which she thought would fulfil the need of ensuring that her daughter had social contact with children and other adults. A friend told her of the Montessori school her children were attending and with vague recollections of having "heard about the philosophy during her teacher training course" (Interview #1, p3, 2/8/94), she set about investigating what was on offer which went beyond the traditional. Jean finally settled on what she regarded as a quality Montessori playgroup.

From this initial involvement Jean met Susan, a Montessori teacher, and became involved in part time work at a local Montessori playgroup. Susan became her mentor and encouraged her to commence a Montessori methods course. Jean described Susan to me in the following way:

> Susan's enthusiasm was very hard to withstand. She was magic, a gifted communicator and a very good teacher of teaching. Susan was my personal tutor and adviser during my correspondence work with the

> Montessori Institute, and she was the former owner of my school. (Interview #1, p7, 2/8/94)

Jean was approached to establish and run a playgroup and this subsequently led to the purchase of Swanleigh and her full involvement in the Montessori education system.

View of teaching

Jean regards the Montessori approach as special because it gives the children credit for what they are capable of doing.

> It allows each child to be what they are, and the teachers are given the freedom to let them be that. I find it more demanding because you are having to get around to every individual child so much more than you do in the traditional setting, but I also find it more satisfying. (Interview #1, p6, 2/8/94)

The Montessori Method of teaching offers Jean a better alternative to the traditional approach to early childhood education. She explained that children are capable of much more than the traditional system recognises and caters for, and that the Montessori teacher has the freedom to let children develop and grow at their own pace. Jean made reference to teaching in the Montessori setting, as being very demanding but also very satisfying as children receive individual assistance and are never pressured to keep up with peers. Jean spoke very highly of the Montessori equipment in that the children gain an early understanding of the difficult concepts which often cause stumbling blocks in later grades in traditional schools.

Jean's role as teacher was primarily concerned with observing and facilitating rather than directing. She made reference to Montessori's *absorbent mind* :

> ... that is what I am trying to facilitate, children's absorption. As they initiate an interest I am trying to present them with what they can then absorb and keep forever and build on. This is the crux of Montessori philosophy and she too felt very strongly that teachers were facilitators rather than the focus of the classroom. (Interview #2, p2, 9/8/94)

Jean's job was to provide the materials and environment which would benefit children in their development and to facilitate where necessary. "I want the classroom to do the job and for me to pounce on the things that happen" (Interview #2 p1 9/8/94) she explained. Jean saw her role firstly to instruct children on how to use the materials by demonstrating the task and then to support the children as they imitate and continually experience the task at will.

During my observations I noted a strong emphasis on the individual rather than the group and Jean spent a great deal of her time fostering this approach by catering for specific needs and interests. Children worked at activities of their choice, a great proportion of which were reality-based, using real life materials. Montessori is about imparting 'life skills'. Here, practical skills in every day life such as setting the table, sweeping the floor, grating cheese, pouring, cleaning, polishing and tying shoelaces, were being completed with enthusiasm and more surprisingly, with obvious pleasure. According to Jean, these tasks were designed to develop competence in daily life now and for the future, and to show children how to be contributing members of society. I asked Jean about the importance of 'life skills' and she explained:

> Life skills give the children this wonderful independence... it is being responsible for the job, and I think it goes towards the self-discipline that they have too... I would say that the self-discipline is a tremendous gift that the children who come to Montessori get. (Interview #2, p4, 9/8/94)

When we talked about what was so special about Montessori, Jean explained that the method "gives children credit for what they are capable of doing. It allows each child to be who they are and the teacher is given the freedom to let them be that" (Interview #1, p5, 2/8/94).

Jean's curriculum was centred around children learning how to learn through the development of the senses and practical life skills. By preparing the environment in the Montessori way, Jean established a child-centred program where children were free to pursue individual interests, albeit within the confines of the structured activities.

Being influenced by her kindergarten training was something Jean freely admitted. She claimed that, "being eighty percent Montessori and twenty percent kindergarten" was a means of meeting the needs of the whole child, in particular, the creative side which in her mind was an important aspect of the development of children from three to six years. (According to Montessori creativity is a key area in the second stage of children's development from six to nine years of age). Jean was also concerned about meeting needs related to today's society which may not have been an issue when Maria Montessori set up her first 'Children's House'. She recognised that this was a dilemma. Jean was aware that her strong commitment to Montessori methods may be over taken by other influences and consequently she was conscious of maintaining a strong Montessori experience for the parents and for the children's sake. She described this dilemma as follows:

> The parents send their children here because they want their children to have a Montessori experience and I have found Montessori and I believe in it strongly, so I want to offer that experience but at the same time my experience is not great. I am learning with the children. Sue, the woman I took over from had a great balance, which I have tried to keep. This was offering the best of the Montessori philosophy but at the same time bringing in anything she found in the wider education field that the children could benefit from. (Interview #6, p5-6, 25/10/94)

Jean constantly emphasised her role as observer and facilitator, rather than director. She explained her role as "trying to capture the *teachable moments* ".

> When the children initiate the interest they'll ask to be shown something, and when they hit a flat spot, it's up to me to then know what they've been doing so they can go on to the next stage. This way their interest will be sustained and they will get over the flat spot. (Interview #2, p3, 9/8/94)

Noting the highs and lows of a child's experience, identifying the child's initiation of interest, capitalising on this interest, and recognising when the child hits a flat spot, required Jean to be vigilant in her observation and to take direct action.

Although much of Jean's discourse was about child-centred learning and the need to respond to individual needs, in my experience there was also strong evidence of demonstration and direct teaching. According to Jean, the Montessori teacher demonstrates the correct method of using apparatus. The process of demonstration was known as the "three period lesson". It was a prescriptive format used to introduce a child to a new piece of equipment which then allows them to independently use it in order to

achieve full mastery. The "three period lesson" formed the foundation of the Montessori classroom and Jean illustrated this point as follows:

> It wouldn't matter what part of the world you were in, or in what language they (teachers) were speaking, they would be using the 'three period lesson'. The ritual of Montessori is, 'this is', 'show me', 'what's this?'. That is the 'three period lesson' and that is the vocabulary you use to introduce everything in the classroom. It is very formal and very direct, and it is the minimal of language. You just give them the information and leave it at that. (Interview #1, p8-9, 2/8/94)

The Setting: Swanleigh Montessori School

Swanleigh Montessori School is situated in an aging suburb which was once regarded as a thriving, cosmopolitan neighbourhood relatively close to the city centre. It leases two traditional classrooms from the local primary school where the number of children attending the school has dropped significantly over the last ten years, and hence the extra space which allows the Swanleigh Montessori school to take up residence. The primary school building shows signs of its history. Once catering for a large bustling multicultural community, now it lies rather quietly, several rooms unused, attendance numbers at a low ebb, reflecting a shifting population. The dreary, yet imposing linear style building in the familiar u-shape, stands out amongst the small neat houses in the nearby streets many of which have been restored to former elegance. Box shaped classrooms line a large concrete quadrangle, and Swanleigh has two of these classrooms. The classrooms have been connected by removing an interior dividing wall and there is easy access throughout, although it still has the feel of two rooms, rather than one large open space. In Jean's words it is not an ideal setting. The outdoor play area is a 50 metre

walk from the classroom and this is shared by other groups at the school thus restricting use and access to the outdoor equipment. The toilet block is located at the end of the quadrangle and requires an adult to accompany the children.

The interior of the Swanleigh classrooms is in stark contrast to the building's dingy, heavy appearance of bricks and mortar. The classrooms have high ceilings with ventilation fans, the windows are set high and although they offer little in terms of the view of the outside world, the natural light washes through to all corners of the room. The floor is carpeted, the walls freshly painted, and gas heaters are situated at each end of the room giving the inside area a warm, cosy feeling.

The children moved freely throughout the two classroom spaces. The children came from a variety of cultural backgrounds and with the set fee structure it was not surprising that the school drew on a middle to high socio-economic group. The children appeared well groomed and cared for, often sporting the latest fashion although not always practical in the pre-school setting. Jean's day was largely structured to suit the constraints of the location of her school and the compromises which went with sharing amenities with the local primary school. Jean told me that ideally there would be a greater proportion of free activity time, where children could choose between the indoor and outdoor activities, however, this was not possible and therefore the restrictions had resulted in a more sequenced timetable for the day. During the observation period I noted a certain amount of flexibility with sections of this timetable, however the free choice activity period remained a significant proportion of time, and appeared to be sacrosanct.

When I entered the room for the first time I was most impressed by the sense of neatness, order and precision and the notion of preparedness. The environment was striking in its attention to being in tune with the size of the children and in its aesthetic appeal. Every item of equipment had its place and purpose and was strategically

arranged and organised. The structure of the classroom space was deliberately planned and carefully prepared by the teacher, with materials located in a constant place in full view and continuously accessible to the children. Materials were grouped together according to their use and function, and arranged in order of difficulty. Jean told me that the children played a key role in the maintenance of the order and design in the classroom and this activity was a significant part of the development of, 'practical life skills' and of the child's self-confidence, self-mastery and independence, as advocated by Maria Montessori (Montessori, 1966). I had a feeling of planned consistency and uniformity in the design of the room, and a sense of regularity in what happened in this classroom.

The traditional Montessori resources and equipment were arranged throughout the double classrooms. In the first classroom, the materials, tables and chairs were arranged around the edges of the room and the central floor space, which has a large circle marked on it, was available for individual, pair and group work. Here, the main learning materials were what Maria Montessori would describe as academic and cultural materials (Lay-Dopyera & Lay-Dopyera, 1990), language, reading, writing, mathematics, and geography. The original blackboard listed the rules of the centre; walk in the classroom; work quietly; walk to the toilet; be friends; leave others to work alone; take care of equipment; remember other people; remember to use your brain; have fun. Next to the blackboard was a small pin-up board where children could display their work if they chose. However, this was not greatly encouraged as it was the belief that children should want to work for their own sake, for the intrinsic desire and personal benefits and not for the need to have it acknowledged by the teacher or others.

In the second room, the kitchen took up a prominent position. All the equipment was child sized, again emphasising accessibility, and total involvement by the children. As with the traditional home, the kitchen seemed to be the hub of the centre. I saw it constantly occupied by children engaged in a range of activities. The atmosphere was

relaxed, children continuously chatting to each other, overseeing each other's work, but engrossed in their own individual activity. The kitchen area was sectioned off from the remainder of the room by low cupboards and shelves which were at the children's level, and this formed a semi-enclosed area. In the centre of this space were tables and chairs, enough to accommodate approximately six children at once. Against the wall was the washing up area, with basin, tea towels and drying racks. On the centre tables were large bowls of fruit and nuts. The surrounding shelves contained a range of equipment which encourage children to perform tasks which adults would normally perform. For example I observed children polishing silverware, shining shoes, preparing snacks, and pouring liquids, always using appropriate life size tools, and always packing away and cleaning their work space ready for the next person. Brooms, carpet sweepers, dust pans, cloths, and mops were examples of the tools available for children to use.

The sensory materials were also located at this end of the centre. The materials, including; visual, tactile, auditory and olfactory were carefully organised on the shelves lining the walls and remained permanent fixtures of this area. Jean had set up tables for art and craft activities where the emphasis was on fine motor skills, with fine paint brushes, pencils and pens of all shapes and sizes being the main tools. Along the ledge of the old blackboard Jean had placed the sand paper letters and matching pictures for learning the alphabet. A regular activity for the children was to complete scrapbooks of sounds and related pictures and this activity was regarded as a significant step in the scheme of learning to read. Hanging on a hook were the individual green mats which the children used when they elected to complete an activity on the floor. The preparation for an activity was a significant part of the ritual of becoming occupied or engaged with the material.

Swanleigh catered for a mixed age group of twenty, three, four and five year olds. This grouping was regarded by Jean as one of the significant advantages of the

Montessori approach. It allowed the children to work within a family setting, where they could learn from one another in a non-threatening situation.

A Typical Day

On my regular day of observation I normally arrived well before the start of school and this gave Jean and myself an uninterrupted time to meet and discuss issues and for me to raise questions stemming from previous observations. Often this discussion was continued later in the day. On several occasions we sat and talked about the morning's activities as we supervised outdoor play together, whilst on other occasions we would meet while the children prepared for lunch.

The parents arrival would signal to Jean and myself that the discussion was ended and I would take up a vantage point, generally in a corner of the room to write my field notes. I was very conscious of the Montessori policy for observations in the class for three to six year old children, which specifies no direct contact and hence no interruption to the children's work or to the teacher's work. This made me very unsure of my role in the early stages of field work. I avoided making contact with the children, unlike the situation at Radford and if I was approached by a child I tried to cut the conversation short. Gradually, approaches from the children increased, as they became more familiar with my presence in the room. I eventually discussed my dilemma with Jean, who advised me to put my anxieties aside and to feel free to be part of the group. I must admit, that whilst I felt more relaxed and interacted more frequently with the children I did not operate in the same manner as I did at Radford Pre-Primary.

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Jean arrived early each day to prepare the environment for the day's program. The major preparation would take place in the kitchen where the practical life activities were organised. The fresh food products were placed on the appropriate trays ready for use. The bread, butter, jam, peanut butter, and vegemite were arranged on the shelf. The fruit bowl was prepared and placed on the centre of the table. A variety of dried beans, macaroni shapes and rice, used for a range of activities such as pouring, weighing, and filling containers were prepared and on the shelf ready for use. Water for washing and cleaning had to be carted by Jean from a nearby washroom. Lastly, Jean would decide on the music and story for the day and reviewed the list of children designated for her particular attention that day.

The children began to arrive in slow succession. I noted a lack of urgency about meeting a designated arrival time, rather there was a casual, leisurely depositing of the children at the door. The children were most often accompanied by a parent or a member of the family and in most cases the parent did not enter the classroom, but rather goodbyes were said at the door, bags placed on the rack outside and the children entered the room. Possessions were placed in a drawer and children made their way to greet the teacher and to begin a "job" (a Montessori term for activity or learning experience). Only if there was a separation problem and a child was reluctant to leave the parent, did the parent enter the room and spend a little time along-side the child until they settled and the separation could be happily made. In these cases, the parent eventually slipped quietly away and rarely was there an emotional scene. Generally, parents were not encouraged to stay. I observed that there was no parent helper scheme in Swanleigh, however, should a parent wish to observe their child, then formal arrangements could be made for parents to do so. The parent observation was regarded in Montessori terms as an opportunity for the child to share with the parent what life is like Montessori-style with as little interruption as possible to the child's day.

I understood the greeting to be an important part of the morning procedure for Jean and she made herself available to meet the children at the door as they arrived. The interchange was bright, cheerful and personal although brief. "Good morning Natasha, how are you today? What lovely yellow socks, they match your yellow bow. I have green on today, can you see where I have green on?' (Field Notes: p9, 2/8/94). Jean would take the child's hand and shake it firmly. Natasha, a three year old, moved confidently towards a group of children crowded around a table, excitedly observing caterpillars in a jar. She stood and watched for a few moments, hands behind her back, and then moved to the shelves, chose a job and sat at a nearby table to unpack and complete the activity. She quickly settled to the task. This was Natasha's first day at Montessori although you would think she was a veteran. Jean kept a watchful eye on her throughout the morning, but no particular induction occurred for Natasha on this first day. Jean explained later that the induction occurred on the day that Natasha was enrolled. On that day, the routines and procedures were explained and Natasha was able to familiarise herself with the surroundings, materials, and operation of the centre. Gradually, over time, a steady continual induction or absorption into the scheme of things would occur as Natasha was introduced to the various apparatus and activities and the procedures associated with carrying them out would be repeated and reinforced.

By the time most children had arrived, the classroom reverberated with a high level of noise and energy. The children laughed and talked, sharing experiences and being sociable, yet there was also a sense of individuality as the children worked side by side at their own personal job. I did not see group work as a feature of this classroom. Generally, the children worked alone, seated along side companions, unless the teacher brought together pairs or groups of children for a specific task, or a child particularly asked another for assistance or to become involved.

Jean's role was not a prominent one. She explained to me that she was not the controlling influence or focus of the classroom that traditional pre-school teachers seem to be. Rather the materials, organisation of the environment, method of teaching and the practical life skills were oriented towards helping the children become self disciplined and independent.

> It's not a baby sitting job. It's actually teaching them something that is of importance to them. Everything they do is real and has a purpose and is giving them a life skill. It's individual work or self chosen work. Montessori gives children this wonderful independence and self-discipline as they become responsible for the job. (Interview #2 p3-4, 9/8/94)

The children were expected to make decisions about what they wanted to do and to become immersed in the task of their choice. In my view, the 'rules' of the centre were implicit in the organisation and in the prescriptive way that the materials were to be used. I felt a strong sense of order and predictability in the program as the apparatus and activities were carefully sequenced to build on previous knowledge and experiences. Freedom of choice allowed children to follow interests and to persevere at tasks for as long as that interest could be sustained. Consequently many children displayed the ability to attend and to be engaged for long periods of time and to take control of their own actions.

There was a strong feeling of prescription and organisation, a method and plan to what was happening. The centre ran like clockwork. Materials were the central focus and there was a very long standing tradition for taking, using, packing up and replacing the job. This was a ritual imparted to the children as part of their induction into the Montessori method. There was also a particular pattern of behaviour for preparing the

work areas and for clearing away, "ready for the next person". I saw children take a placemat and place it on a table to mark out their work area. The children would then decide on the job they wanted to complete, go to the shelf, take the tray which contained all the necessary material and set it down on their placemat. The job may be a simple activity of matching cylinder rods to the appropriate space, or it may be a complicated activity where the child was required to match textures of fabric through the sense of touch, whilst wearing a blind fold. The complexity of the task determined the amount of time spent on the job. There were no time restrictions, nor was there a prescribed number of jobs which should be completed. The child remained engaged with the task until it was completed. On completion, the child might invite others to "come and look at my job" whereby a number of children would leave their posts, and wander over to praise and acknowledge the effort, along with Jean or her assistant. Jean described this as providing a form of reward for the child and building a sense of satisfaction for having completed the task. Finally, the child would begin to rearrange the materials on the tray and take it back to the spot on the shelf from where it came. One job at a time was the rule and so there was always a sense of organisation and design to the work areas.

A noticeable feature of the working environment was the level of concentrated involvement with a job displayed by the children. At odd times I would look up from my note book in response to the silence which had descended in the room, to find the children totally engrossed in their work. There was an atmosphere of purpose and endeavour and with minimal constraints on the use of time, the children had the opportunity to become involved in the serious business of completing jobs.

Alice, a three year old, was in the kitchen. She took a tray from the shelf and sat at the table, along side two girls who were matching lids of various sizes to jars. Alice's tray contained a nut cracker, and a bowl of walnuts. Slowly and deliberately, and with great difficulty at first, she manipulated the large adult size nut cracker. She placed the

walnut between the jaws, holding tight, trying to stop the nut from slipping and sliding free. After thirty five minutes of concentrated effort, Alice had a pile of shells on her tray. During this time she had not uttered a word to anyone as she battled with the nut cracker, her patience and energy was rewarded by her feast of walnuts. She had been totally engrossed in her task. A number of children had come and gone from the kitchen, yet she had remained oblivious of her surroundings, such had been her total involvement and commitment to her job. Satisfied with her feast Alice began the ritual of clearing her space. She carefully pressed the peddle of the 'food bin' with her foot, emptied the shells into the bin, washed her plate, dried it, placed it on the tray and returned the tray to the shelf. This task in itself is what Maria Montessori would classify as another job. Her work area was wiped down with a cloth, and the placemat returned to its original spot.

As Alice battled the nut cracker, Mia, a four year old, appeared in the corner of the room. She took a green mat and placed it on the floor. She moved around it straightening the edges, spreading the mat until she was happy with the way it looked. She chose the pink blocks from the shelf, placed them in the centre of the mat and began to build the 'pink tower' from biggest to smallest. As she worked Ryan (a five year old) wandered over and attempted to lend a helping hand. Jean, busy with a group nearby, intervened. "You're not watching properly, Ryan, this is Mia's job. Hands behind your back if you want to stay and watch. You can have the blocks when Mia has finished with them" (Field Notes: p9, 2/8/94). Mia built her tower quickly, not strictly in ascending order, then moved over to the small bell placed in a central position in the classroom, and rang it vigorously. "Anyone want to look at my job?" she announced in a firm voice above the working din of the mornings activities. "Yes" cried several children as they began to move towards Mia's green mat, and pink tower. Jean also approached and surveyed the finished product. "This is an interesting tower, Mia. Would you like to build it again?" she asked enthusiastically. There was no reference made by Jean to the fact that the tower was not correctly built. However, Mia was not interested in pressing it

further, and elected to pack it away. Jean later explained that she had made a note of the incident and would follow up the next day by building the tower correctly and specifically inviting Mia to come and look and encourage her to build it again. Jean also explained that it is the Montessori way to avoid telling children what they have done incorrectly and to dwell on the positive rather than the negative, thus building children's self esteem.

Materials were used strictly for the purpose for which they had been designed. Free play with the Montessori apparatus, in the experimental sense, was strictly not encouraged. The pink tower had a specific purpose with particular concepts to be learned and was only used in the prescribed manner. If children showed an interest in building boats, roads, buildings, or other constructions different blocks would be supplied specifically for that purpose.

During the morning routine, Jean moved about the classroom area from child to child observing, demonstrating and conducting a 'three period lesson' or a 'fundamental lesson'. Children became involved with a range of apparatus which all carried specific concepts to be mastered. The appropriateness of the apparatus for the children could be measured by the degree of concentration and interest displayed. My understanding is that Maria Montessori believed that if the activities matched the inner development of the child he or she would be content to complete them repeatedly, thus education became a natural spontaneous process which developed from within the human being through the child's experiences (Montessori 1967). There was a constant buzz of activity and movement, as the children went about selecting and completing jobs.

Martin arranged a green mat in the centre of the open space and began to siphon water from one bucket to another using a hand pump. He watched carefully and intently as the water pumped through the plastic hose. He worked alone and when the bucket

filled he proceeded to reverse the process. Children moved about him, giving a cursory glance, as they went about their own activity.

In the 'geography' corner, three girls examined dolls dressed in costumes of various countries around the world. They discussed the dolls' dress and appearance and the various countries they represented. Gradually the talk became less focussed as they slid into fantasy play using the dolls as props. The laughter increased in volume as the three girls become involved in their game. The excessive noise attracted Jean's attention and she approached and commented on the appropriateness of the job. "Are you doing this job properly? If you are doing this job you should be sitting, and not being so rough with the dolls, they are very delicate and precious and we need to be very gentle. I think you can pack away and come to me, I have something I would like you to do" (Field Notes: p37, 25/10/94). As the girls replaced the dolls on the shelf and tidied up their work area, Jean quickly moved to oversee other areas of the room, but promptly returned to meet the girls in the centre of the room. "See these tables, I would like you to clean them for me, so they will be beautiful for the next people. They have a lot of pencil marks on them and we need to scrub them well." Jean momentarily disappeared to the kitchen to return with the scrubbing equipment. A bucket with water, soap, sponge and towel. For one of the girls this was her first experience with this activity so Jean proceeded to clearly and explicitly explain the procedure, step by step. "What's the first thing we do? Get some water from the bucket and wet the table. The soap lives in the holder, and you use it to rub on the sponge and then use the sponge to scrub the tables. When the table is clean, squeeze the sponge in the bucket and use it to soak up all the bubbles. At the end, use the towel to wipe the table so it is dry and someone can come and read a book here" (Field Notes: p38, 25/10/94). With these instructions the girls set about methodically and competently scrubbing the tables. They became totally absorbed as they followed the procedure as explained, each with their own set of equipment and table to clean.

In the centre of the room, Martin had accidentally spilled the bucket of water on the carpet. Jean calmly and systematically began to turn this incident into a demonstration for the group of children near by. "If you spill water at home on the carpet, this is what you do. You don't rub, you press. Make a pad with a towel, like this, folding so it is thick, and press over the wet spot." (Field Notes: p41, 25/10/94) Several nearby children joined in this operation, the incident turned into a spontaneous learning situation, another practical life skill, aimed at making the children self sufficient.

The kitchen was an area which was continually occupied. Sarah (4 year old) expertly handled a knife to spread butter and peanut paste on a slice of bread, whilst Amanda confidently cut an apple into manageable pieces and ate her fruit. Cindy had set up her work area. She took a brass statue of a fish from the display shelf and placed it on her placemat. She moved to the tray of containers and held one up to Jean asking, "Is this the polish?" Jean replied, "Is your fish made of brass?" "Yes" said Cindy. "Then, yes, you have the polish for brass. Remember, when we see writing like this it means that it is poisonous and we need to be very careful". Satisfied, Cindy took the polish to her work area and poured a small amount into a tiny bowl, replaced the lid and proceeded to dip a soft cloth into the polish and rub it over the fish figure (Field Notes: 1/1194).

The bell interrupted the hive of activity. "Would anyone like to see my job?" announced Steven who had patiently matched a set of keys to the appropriate locks, and which were now lying neatly in a row, smallest to largest. "Yes," cried several children, as they moved from their respective jobs and wandered to Steven's work area. The bell signalled a break in the proceedings, a coming together of the group as attention was gained and the majority responded to the sound. In my experience the bell provided the opportunity for sharing a completed activity and this resulted in the recognition of effort, perseverance and completion. The bell was also rung by children who required a visit to

the bathroom. This routine must be accompanied by an adult so the bell was used to gather up a group with the announcement "Does any one else want to go to the bathroom?" A third use of the bell I witnessed involved a child ringing and making the announcement, "It's too noisy!" This was immediately followed by a comment from Jean with the result that the noise level decreased considerably. Jean explained to me that the ringing of the bell gave the children a degree of power and control and enabled them to take responsibility over the happenings in the classroom.

At approximately ten thirty the teacher announced pack away time and the pace changed gear. Quickly and efficiently the children cleared away remaining materials, organised the environment and made their way to the mat area where they sat in the marked circle and waited for the teacher. The three year olds were instructed to sit at the front, with the four year olds behind and the five year olds at the back of the group. Jean described this part of the day as her 'kindergarten influence'. In time I grew to recognise that mat time was not a big focus of the program, rather it was a transition time, a way of moving children from one section of the day to the next. In most cases the assistant conducted the session. Jean placed significantly greater emphasis on the individual work or "self chosen work".

> We have some little games like 'show and tell' and we do have music and story to finish off each morning session. But no, its not the focus of what the children do. I think it is very hard for little ones to do the amount of mat time they do in the other schools. I think it is a skill that they ask them to be too good at, too soon. They are very egocentric at this age and it is very important that they work by themselves, because that is what they like to do. By 5 years they are ready, and quite enjoy starting to do some cooperative work. (Interview #2, p5, 9/8/94)

On the mat, the roll was quickly called and absences noted, the calendar checked, and the main activity for the day introduced. Today it was a news sharing session. Children were rostered on certain days to tell their news. Generally they brought something from home to 'show and tell'. The teacher or assistant and the news teller sat side by side on small chairs in front of the group. The children greeted the news teller, "Good morning Andrea". "Good morning everyone," she replied and proceeded to tell about her dragon mask. The children were encouraged to ask questions but they did not put their hands up for permission to speak. The teacher controlled the question-answer period by monitoring the speakers if they became too undisciplined. The three year olds listened intently at the front. They sat patiently, absorbing the information. The four and five year olds were more restless, as one by one the five children allocated for the day went through their news. To conclude, Jean took a bundle of name cards and when she flashed the card and the children recognised their name they moved to retrieve their sun hat and to stand by the door to be taken to the playground area for outdoor play.

In pairs the group moved with the teacher in an orderly fashion to the outdoor play area located about 50 metres away from the classroom. This was an unstructured free play time in the sand pit and on the fixed apparatus. Occasionally Jean would bring out the carpentry materials and this was set up as an optional extra. The only other materials were the shovels and buckets brought to the area in a large plastic basket. The fact that the play area was shared by other groups in the school and the distance from the Swanleigh classrooms prohibited a great deal of organisation and therefore was used mainly as a respite from the classroom and a break from the indoor schedule. Jean regularly lamented the location of the play area in relation to the classroom. She wanted me to know that it was a significant drawback in her overall Montessori program as it did not allow for free movement between the indoor and outdoor areas as would be preferred by her in light of the Montessori way of doing things. Nevertheless the children valued

and enjoyed the outdoor play. It was a time to let off steam, to run and climb and jump and to play in the sand pit.

On exceptionally hot days, which Western Australia is prone to experience, Jean would schedule outdoor play at the beginning of the day. With the greeting over she would usher the children to the playground which was shaded from the sun at this time of the day. Jean assured me that with some physical activity to begin the day, the children would be content to spend the remainder of the day in the cool of the classroom.

On returning to the classroom, the children prepared for lunch. Jean explained to me the importance of this time according to Montessori. Lunch was a key celebration in the Montessori classroom. All children remained at school for lunch, even the younger age group who would normally attend half day sessions. Meal time was an important sharing time, and as with the home it represented a coming together of the family and a gathering that encouraged communication, interaction and a sense of togetherness and community. The routine was a highly developed system of preparation which all children participated in. As the children entered from the outdoor play session, they proceeded to the wash basin and one by one washed and dried their hands and then moved to claim a place to set up for their lunch. From the shelf in the kitchen they took a placemat, and their own individually named plate and mug and serviette, rolled and firmly secured with a ring. These were carefully placed in correct position and finally the lunch box was retrieved from the school bag and placed in the central position. Throughout this process Jean and her assistant oversaw the group. "What are you missing? You need a plate, Matthew. Go and get your lunch Mia." When all seemed ready, Jean clapped her hands and called attention. The noise level subsided quickly as children settled quietly and with eyes closed and hands joined together they recite the "Thank you" prayer. Serviettes were unrolled and placed on their knees, and food was taken from the lunch box and placed on the plate. "We eat sandwiches and good food first then the treat," reminded

Jean. Once all had settled Jean and her assistant joined the children with their lunch. The lunch time sharing of food was a demonstration of the importance of meal time found in Italian culture and a reflection of Maria Montessori's views of 'family' and 'home'. The 'family' group shared in a joint celebration, and learned to function as a unit. The socialisation occurred within a totally natural setting which had been set up and cultivated by the teacher. As children finished lunch the packing up routine was commenced. Utensils were washed, dried and replaced, placemats returned and tables wiped. Lunch boxes were replaced in school bags and the children assembled in the green circle. As some children awaited the arrival of parents, Jean occupied the group in a singalong. When a parent appeared at the door, Jean announced the child's name, the child would come forward, shake her outstretched hand and bid, "Good afternoon Mrs Howard". "Good afternoon Mia", replies Jean as Mia joined her mother at the door.

Rituals in Swanleigh Montessori School

Montessori education is highly ritualised. The system is a re-enactment, by the teacher and the children, of a set of events which in turn has become an acknowledgment of a 'sacred' system. The approach has evolved since the turn of the century with a set of myths in tact about the origins and foundations of Montessori. These myths have persisted over time because they are tied to a strong philosophical belief system which has been accepted by the followers and believers. Montessori education is the same the world over. If one was to enter a Montessori classroom in Malaysia, Kathmandu, United States of America, or Australia, the core features would be the same.

Jean is strongly committed to the Montessori method of teaching despite her small deviations which come from her kindergarten influence and which she incorporates in her program as variations. To this end she religiously follows the philosophy and takes on the teacher's role as prescribed by Maria Montessori. According to the Montessori World

Educational Institute the approach is, "a way of looking at, and understanding children, it is a view of how children develop and learn which has been translated into a systematic method of education based upon careful scientific study" (undated course booklet). Much of the teacher's behaviours and the children's behaviours at Swanleigh appear ritualised in that they are scripted, stylised and rehearsed. Over the period of my observations, the daily actions remained constant. Jean acted in the same way, as did the children. When there were signs of variation in the utilisation of the materials, this was regarded as some form of misuse of materials and invariably the response from Jean was to curtail the misuse immediately.

Through the culture and the performance inherent in Swanleigh, Jean perpetuates the beliefs and foundations that inform and sustain the school's sense of identity. This sense of identity brings order and shapes the events and plans, thus codifying a set of working principles for the teacher and the children. The ideology at work in this classroom is clearly visible to all who enter and who are familiar with the Montessori method even to the extent, that the children recognised the consistency and repetitive nature of instruction.

> I was working with Richard on a number job when he said, "That's what you do when you tell me the letters." He'd picked up the format I use and to me that is the very obvious set structured action that I think is ritualised. It's the ritual that I and the children perform and it has been set up that way for the children. (Interview #3, p1, 16/8/94)

For Jean many parts of her program were protected and regarded as sacred as she upheld the Montessori tradition.

Coming to school: The parents park their car on the street verge and usher their children through the gate, up the path and along the verandah to the Swanleigh classrooms. Outside the classroom is the coat stand where the children deposit their bags and coats before entering the room. Nearby is a portable notice board where Jean displays messages for parents about coming events, and excursions and where parents may sign up for an observation day. There is no parent helper roster, as for Radford. The idea of being a parent helper for the day is not part of the Montessori method and therefore Jean does not cultivate this tradition. Most often the child is accompanied by a parent or grandparent. There is no designated starting time although most children are deposited by nine o'clock. Conversely, it is not unusual to have a child wander in well after this time, having slept in, or just been 'slow to begin the day'. There does not seem to be the pressure and intensity of 'being at school' although from the children's point of view 'school' is serious business.

As parents gather and chat informally at the door, the children quickly make their way into the classroom. Jean waits by the door to greet each child as he or she enters. She addresses each individual child with a personal comment and a shake of the hand. Without great fanfare, items are deposited in personal drawers and the child moves into the room to take up their first job. Occasionally Jean will make a comment to a parent, but in-depth discussions are generally held at a scheduled meeting time. Once the child seems settled the parent will quickly leave with a hug and cuddle and cheerful goodbye. Rarely did I observe detachment difficulties and even when Natasha, a three year old, began her first day it was as if she had experienced the event many times before. She was absorbed into the setting and into the routine without the slightest hesitation. By the time the last child is welcomed and Jean leaves the front door most children are fully engaged in tasks and totally immersed in the system.

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'Coming to school' was an event, which like many other events in this classroom had a ritualised expectation of performance. The parents and children knew how to behave and what was expected. Variations to this performance rarely occurred. Entering the door meant entering a world which was based on the teacher's construction of knowledge and understandings defined by Maria Montessori herself. When children entered the classroom it was as if they transferred to a new cultural system. Montessori's notion of the 'Children's House', and its 'prepared environment' was intended to provide children with the ideal situation, a school within a house, where a particular scientific pedagogy could be applied for the betterment of society (Montessori, 1964).

Socialising children

Unlike Radford Pre-Primary, Swanleigh was not intent on socialising children to be part of a group nor was there an emphasis on encouraging social interaction among children. Rather, Jean was committed to socialising the children into the Montessori way of thinking and doing.

The Montessori method has been heavily criticised for its lack of opportunity for social interaction (Knudsen Lindauer, 1987). Since the Montessori program is so individualised and there is a noticeable restriction on whole group sessions, there seems little scope for the encouragement of interaction. However, here at Swanleigh socialisation occurs whereby the children are inducted into the behaviours, thoughts and sentiments appropriate for this classroom culture. The existing structures of Swanleigh help to define for the child what is proper for this environment. The child learns skills, identifies with role models and develops relationships which are appropriate in this context and which have been identified by Jean as fitting the Montessori tradition.

> Jennifer was one who just seemed to not do anything the whole morning. That's actually an important part of being in a Montessori classroom. It's important that they have the freedom to just float and observe. I take note of it over a few days and I might say, "Jennifer do you need some help finding a job?" But it's an important part of the Montessori classroom to absorb things going on around them and they will come to do it themselves. (Interview #3, p1, 16/8/94)

> I don't think three year olds want to work in a group. They might want to work with a friend.... They're quite happy to do jobs as long as they are next to each other. Some four year olds may be interested in groups, but I find the fives in the afternoon, love to do things as a group. Even though they are doing something different, they still have to interact and be aware of everyone else. So even though they're doing individual tasks it may well still be a small group situation. (Interview #3, p3, 16/8/94)

Swanleigh is very successful in teaching children how to be 'able members' of their classroom according to the codes of behaviour set down for the classroom and how to be 'able human beings' according to the theoretical assumptions claimed by Montessori.

To this end, movement about the classroom is systematic and businesslike. There is no shouting or running or evidence of high-spirited activity, rather the pace is controlled and orderly. The children are left to their own devices and are not hurried to select a job or to become involved, but if a child is observed wandering aimlessly for a considerable amount of time they are encouraged to join the teacher or to take a job. Younger children are encouraged to imitate older children. Watching another at work is a sanctioned occupation and regarded as a legitimate way of learning for the child.

However, watching also has its boundaries and must be done from a certain distance, with hands behind his or her back to avoid the temptation of becoming involved with another's work, which is not acceptable.

Jean is concerned with preparing children for life in the wider society. The method used at Swanleigh links the home and school and attends to the "development of life" (Montessori 1964). Jean's program reflects the theoretical assumption that children become competent learners, including the development of competence in daily living. The practical 'life skills' are introduced through the ritual of the fundamental lesson which becomes a cycle of activity for the child; defining the work space by setting out the placemat; completing the activity by using the materials correctly; then returning the materials to the appropriate place on the shelf. Hence Jean instructs the children on the use of the apparatus through a strict formula of direct demonstration and the children perform repetitive tasks. This ritualised method of becoming occupied with tasks results in the children learning the precise method of using the material which leads to the development of concentration, self confidence and independence thus taking control of their learning and behaviour.

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'Doing a Job' (Cycle of activity): The children select for themselves materials they wish to work with. Once a selection has been made, a cycle of activity begins; choosing a work area; setting up the work space; completing the activity; then packing away. In this way the child helps to maintain a well organised environment, but more importantly the routine is part of character development, an area highly emphasised in the Montessori method. From a Montessori perspective, performing the cycle of activity leads to self discipline, independence, and responsibility.

Natasha decides where she would like to work. She takes a placemat from the pile and places it on a table. She then moves to the shelf, inspects the various puzzles and finally chooses quite a difficult puzzle of a butterfly and takes it to her placemat. Having tipped the pieces out she begins to reconstruct the puzzle. She works alone, slowly replacing the pieces inside the wooden frame. Her concentration is intense as she experiments with intricate pieces and through trial and error builds the puzzle. She perseveres and oblivious of the movement and noise around her, completes her job. With a broad smile she looks around and moves to the centre table to ring the bell. "Does anyone want to see my job?" she announces with obvious pride and satisfaction.

The fundamental lesson: The fundamental lesson is used to introduce individuals to an activity or lesson so that the individual may learn the correct procedure and be free to perform the task independently. The fundamental lesson is characterised by stylised language, and a prescriptive, consistent format. As Jill takes a new job from the shelf Jean swings into action. Her role is to show Jill what has to be done through direct demonstration, thus ensuring Jill's future independence in the use of the material. "This is Jill's job," she announces as two children wander over to look on inquisitively. "Will you take all the pieces out Jill?" Jill removes a number of red cylinders from a box and a number of blue cylinders from another. She lines them up in two rows, red on one side, and blue on the other. "This is what you do. Take the first red cylinder, shake it close to your ear and listen hard. Now find the blue one that sounds the same. Put them at the top of the line in pairs. This is how we do this job. Now you take another red one, and find the blue cylinder that sounds the same." Jean waits for Jill to go through a process of trial and error to match the cylinders and when all are paired she continues, "Let's learn how to pack away. The red ones go in this box and the blue in this box. Take the job back to the shelf, Jill. Now you can do this job whenever you want to" (Field notes: p17, 9/8/94).

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Jean explains that demonstrations should be accompanied by a minimum of verbal direction, yet the steps are planned and prescriptive. The procedure includes; show the child the place on the shelf; tell the child the name of the job; set up the work area (placemat on the table, or green mat on the floor); carry the job to the work place; give the demonstration; invite the child to join in either part way through, or at the completion; continue to help and support; show how to pack away and where to return the job to the shelf. Over subsequent days, Jean will observe the child's attempts at the job and will redemonstrate as a last resort, otherwise the child will be left to deduce problems for herself. Jean explained the fundamental lesson in the following way.

The 'placemat' carries considerable significance in this setting. It represents a work area, marks out the boundaries for a work space and indicates that this particular space belongs to a particular individual. It symbolises ownership of the space and of the activity that will occur at that space. This is also true of the green mat. Again the green mat marks the territory for a child. No-one else can invade this space unless they are invited to do so. In a sense it empowers the child. This space, and the happenings within these boundaries belongs to them.

Teacher as provider and facilitator

Jean's role is to prepare an environment which will meet the needs of the individual children. She designs, plans and organises the materials and acts as a resource for the children as they develop and learn through a natural spontaneous process of interacting with apparatus which embodies certain concepts to be mastered. The notion of the prepared environment is a basic feature of the Montessori methodology and Jean's task is to provide an aesthetically pleasing environment for the children, which is ordered carefully and logically for ease of use.

Jean explains her role as follows:

> I see myself more as a facilitator rather than a director, I want the classroom to do the job and I am there to pounce on the things that happen, for example when Jill got out the sound boxes today, to make sure she knows what has to be done.... if she gets them out again then she will know what to do. Teachers are facilitators rather than the focus of the classroom. They are part of the classroom but they are not the pivot point. (Interview #2, p1-2, 9/8/94)

The most important aspects of the teacher's task are observing, facilitating and waiting for what Jean describes as, "the teachable moment". Anticipating when children are ready to be shown the next step, thus moving them on through their expression of interest to the next piece of equipment. Jean acts as an aide or resource for the children, as they make their own way through the Montessori curriculum.

In its basic form, a 'three period lesson' includes three phases, "this is", "show me" and "what's this?" Jean describes a 'three period lesson' as "the basis of a Montessori classroom". She adds, "It wouldn't matter what part of the world you were in, or what language was being spoken, the Montessori teacher would be using the three period lesson". The simple message is, teacher demonstration, "This is a letter C", teacher testing, "show me a C", "what is this?", followed by teacher feedback. Jean describes this technique as:

> a scientific way of introducing things to the children because you have got a control on it, and you know whether they know it or whether you need to do it again tomorrow. It is the most productive way to keep a tab on what the children are doing." (Interview #1, p8, 2/8/94)

The three period lesson:: This method represents a formal approach to teaching, one on one. A minimum of language is used during the direct interchange, with the teacher giving only the essential information without distractions with peripheral language.
"Would you like to do some work in your scrap book Susie? You can choose two letters today". Susie takes the sand paper letter cards representing L and I from the blackboard ledge, places them on a table and goes to find her scrapbook. She quickly settles next to Jean and in a one to one situation, they begin the activity together. Jean begins, "This letter is an L and the sound says L. What is it Susie?" "L" repeats Susie. "Feel it Susie, rub your fingers over it starting here and finishing here. This is an L." Jean repeats the process for the letter I. "Show me L and show me I?" asks Jean. She continues to ask this question several times until Susie can confidently identify the two letters. Susie is instructed to complete a rubbing of the letters and to draw pictures that begin with the two letters on separate pages in the scrapbook. Jean leaves the table and attends to various children, before returning to check on Susie's progress. "Nice work, Susie, what is this?" Susie names the letters proudly and confidently. "Well done, you have some good pictures too, keep working on that" (Field Notes: p10, 2/8/94).

Richard takes a green mat and lays it out in the centre of the open space. He chooses the red rods and when they are unpacked he begins to make a line combining different lengths to make a number sentence. He struggles and his attention wanders to and from the job at hand. Jason joins him on the mat and they begin to move the rods about without any particular plan in mind. As the activity becomes loud and unruly, and attracts Jean's attention, she comments, "Jason that is Richard's job. Are you helping or getting in the way?" This is enough for Jason to move on. Eventually Richard has a combination of 1+4+3+2=10. He continues to gather more red rods to make another combination but his interest has gone, and he leaves his mat and wanders about the room. "Richard do you need help or are you finished?" The teacher takes Richard back to his

mat and suggests he tidy up the rods first, and then they will finish the job. The teacher tells Richard to build the red rods into a staircase, which is the primary objective of the red rods. "Then we can see what we have got." Richard quickly builds the staircase. "Now what do we need to finish the staircase off, to make it all even at the end?" Richard takes more red rods, and places them at the end of each step. "Tell me what it says Richard," encourages Jean. "Nine plus one," says Richard. "Good, I think you should write all this on a piece of paper so we can put it in our scrap book." Jean supervises this activity whilst Richard writes on the paper (Field Notes: p22, 16/8/94).

The kitchen is the hub of the Swanleigh classroom. In this area children learn everyday 'life skills' which according to the Montessori theory will enable them to become contributing members of a social community by becoming self sufficient and disciplined individuals. Children become involved in activities such as cooking, carpentry, sewing, and cleaning. This scene is a hive of activity. Children are engrossed in their job and show an amazing amount of attention to the task. They freely choose the task which interests them most and show qualities of perseverance, concentration and application. The children appear relaxed and comfortable and are not concerned with time constraints. They communicate to one another about their tasks and about general matters and the conversation within the group is cheerful. A noticeable feature is the self reliance and independence of the children which results in orderliness, however, if a task proves too difficult to manage the teacher is quickly on the scene to assist.

As many as eight children can sit around the table in the kitchen at one time. All are involved in their own individual task. Andrew takes a placemat and sets up a work space, with cutting board and knife. He sits and takes an apple from the bowl of fruit in the centre of the table. He turns the apple so it is upright on the board, and places the knife ready to cut. With his free hand he presses down hard on the knife pushing it through the apple. He struggles and stands to get better leverage and eventually the knife

goes through the apple. He then takes one half and lays it flesh down on the board and proceeds to use the knife to cut it again. He repeats this with the other half and when he has the apple in quarters, he happily eats it.

Joanne has set her place, and takes a board with a slice of bread, a knife and two containers, one of butter and the other of jam. She takes the knife and begins to butter the bread and spread the jam. Next to her is Mia who has taken a set of jars of various sizes and a jug containing rice. She pours the rice carefully and fills the various jars, then returns the rice to the jug and begins again repeating the activity several times. Jill has taken a tray with oranges, a juice extractor, knife and glass. She cuts an orange in half and holding it firmly she turns it side to side over the extractor. Slowly, the juice flows and when there is a significant amount she pours it into a glass and drinks it. Matthew has chosen a tray with a piece of cheese, grater and bowl. He patiently grates the cheese into the bowl. Other children are engrossed in various jobs. One uses a nut cracker to crack walnuts, another polishes a brass figure, and yet another is using the carpet sweeper (Field Notes: p9-10, 2/8/94).

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Jean explains the 'three period lesson' as follows:

> The 'three period lesson' is what it all hinges on, and the Montessori classroom can't function without it, because that's how you do your introduction and how you get immediate feedback which helps you to move on with the children. Everyone presents in the same way, so it makes for standardisation between anyone who comes into the classroom to work with the children. It's the process that is at the

forefront all the time. It doesn't really matter who is saying the words, it takes away the focus from the teacher. (Interview #5, p2, 30/8/94)

Inside Swanleigh Montessori school each child works industriously at his or her private experience. The teacher moves about unnoticed, guiding, suggesting, encouraging and providing assistance where needed. The teacher tries to achieve a balance between directing children and encouraging children to follow their own rate of development. The overall impression is one of controlled chaos. It is a vibrant community where needs are based on reality, hence the materials and equipment are real rather than play imitations. The principal aim of the Montessori method is to promote independence, self control, intrinsic motivation, and autonomy.

Summary

The Montessori system of education is steeped in tradition and custom which Jean perpetuated in her school. She consciously and methodically applied the principles of Montessori in her planning and teaching and the children responded by participating correctly. Jean drew on her past experiences as a kindergarten teacher to include elements she considered important in light of today's society. These, however, remained secondary to what she considered were key principles of Montessori education.

Jean's program, made up of the 'three period' lesson, completion of tasks, and the repetitive use of materials reflected an elaborate ritual of sequential steps which could on the surface appear meaningless performances. However, Jean had firm beliefs about the individuality of the growth and development of the child as advocated by Montessori and consciously worked to transform this theory into practice. For Jean, her beliefs guided her practice. Her program was structured to enable children to develop mastery of

certain tasks, deemed to be appropriate to their stage of development. Jean perceived that parents expected certain practices from Swanleigh, and so she adhered to a strict code in her classroom. Thus the program was stylised, certain and patterned, characterised by repetitive actions and a prescriptive formula.

CHAPTER 8

CASE STUDY THREE

Introduction

Case three describes Diane, the third of the participants. Firstly, I outline her early experiences and personal view of teaching and this section is followed by a description of Connor Pre-Primary; its location, the classroom setting, and an outline of a typical day's activity. Finally, I describe rituals at Connor Pre-Primary under the headings of socialising children, and teacher as skilled performer.

Diane

Diane is a tall, slim, attractive young woman in her late twenties. She has a graceful and athletic appearance, which is indicative of her sporting prowess and of her leisure activities which include teaching aerobics and deep sea diving. Her long blond hair is worn in a different exotic style each day, sometimes tied high with it cascading down over one shoulder, other times in a knot with glittering, sequened ties holding it together. Her makeup is always perfectly applied. Diane dresses in the latest fashion which varies significantly from day to day. Her matching accessories are creative and often outlandish. She likes to wear dangling, chunky ear-rings and intricately fashioned necklaces some of which she has made herself. She does not fit the standard stereotype of 'teacher'. Diane takes great pride in her appearance, state of health and fitness and is

particular her daily regime of exercise. Diane has the appearance of a graceful model who would be equally at home on the catwalk as in the classroom.

Diane has been teaching for ten years and appears very comfortable and relaxed in front of her class. She is always bright and cheerful and cultivates an open method of communication with whom she comes in contact. She encourages frequent and open communication with parents and insists on operating on a first name basis with them all. Her contact with the children reflects a certain degree of casualness and accessibility and the children readily respond to this approach. Diane is emphatic about wanting the children to know her as, "a real person" and she says she derives a great deal of pleasure from her contact with children. To this end, her style is spontaneous, natural and personal.

With the children, Diane is pleasant and encouraging. There is a certain level of assertiveness in her commands, and in her presence in the classroom. Diane likes to feel in control of the situation and insists that she is methodical and organised in all aspects of her life and this is how she likes to be in the classroom.

> I feel more in control of the classroom when it is more structured. I've been in pre-primaries where I just shake my head and say, I couldn't work here, because of the noise level and it just seems chaotic. I don't like chaos. I always like to know what is going on, and I like to have things structured. It's just me, I like to be a very organised person, I'm just like that in my life as well as schooling. (Interview #1, p2, 10/8/94)

At the beginning of the school year Diane admits she is "quite firm". She establishes her rules and limits from the first day. Diane likes a certain degree of personal structure and this spills over to the way she runs her centre and is evident in the centre's

organisation and planning. There is method and order to everything Diane does both inside and outside of school and this was clearly illustrated as Diane kept me informed of her on-going wedding preparations scheduled for the following year, and her attention to every minute detail in the preparation for this event.

In her current teaching situation, Diane feels considerable pressure from the administration and from the expectations of the year one teacher at the school. She told me that she thought the administration was narrow in its view of early childhood and had little understanding of the principles of child development. However, the year one teacher, a more experienced and high profile practitioner in the district had very distinct expectations of what the children should be able to do when they arrived in year one. Diane felt very much constrained by this teacher's expectations and regarded her role as being tied very closely with, "getting the children ready for year one".

> There is a great deal of pressure to have the children ready for school. The year one teacher measures the children's readiness by the degree to which they sit still and can concentrate on the mat. How the children perform on the mat is very important to the year one teacher. (Interview #1, p9, 10/8/94)

Early experiences

Diane completed a three year Diploma of Education in Early Childhood Studies at a university in Western Australia. She claimed she has always loved children and had been the baby sitter that had looked after everyone's children in the neighbourhood. Her mother has worked in a Pre-Primary as an assistant for twenty years and Diane acknowledged her mother as her greatest influence in her career. Together, they had spent a great deal of time talking and sharing experiences about school. Diane had seen

how much enjoyment her mother had from working with young children and this strongly influenced her to enter the field. "Given our similar personalities and interests it seemed logical for me to follow my mother into the same profession", explained Diane. She went on to say:

> My Mum has been in it for 20 years and I've grown up with pre-primary. I suppose I'm a bit of a mirror image of my Mum. We're very similar and I've always loved children. I just saw how much enjoyment Mum was getting from it. I remember if I was sick at school and I had to go to work with Mum.... being at pre-primary with Mum would be the best kind of day for me. (Interview #1, p3, 10/8/94)

During her high school years, all opportunities for work experience were carried out in pre-primary centres, holidays and spare time were spent in classrooms, further exemplifying Diane's commitment and interest in the field of early childhood education. Her university study had been enjoyable and fulfilling and she had performed exceptionally well on her final field experience. It was on this final practicum that Diane said she learned the most. She modelled herself on her supervising teacher, used the syllabi materials extensively "to make sure I covered everything" and generally felt she was doing a good job. Consequently when she was appointed to her own classroom she continued to do as she had done during her practicum.

> I just did what my (field experience) teacher did and I thought this is working, this is how you must teach and that's how I came away from university, and to be honest I didn't think about what I was doing. The classroom was running smoothly and the children were enjoying it and I was working from the syllabus down to every activity. I did what we were told a teacher does and I thought in my first year that I did it well.

There was never a question about not doing it well. (Interview #1, p5/6, 10/8/94)

Despite the confidence which Diane exuded, she admitted to not being confident about exerting her own personal views about how and why she would do things in her centre. This she attributed to the influence of a particular principal who oversaw her work in the previous four years and made constant demands on Diane to justify her teaching methods and curriculum content. Diane felt she has been 'moulded' by this principal into doing certain things to meet the principal's expectations rather than following her own personal beliefs about teaching.

She would come down every week and question the children, and notice everything... and that would panic me a bit (Interview #5 p3 7/9/94).
I think she had forgotten that I had taught for five years, she treated me like a graduate. She took a story out of my hand one afternoon because I changed the words in the story and said if it was supposed to be like that the author would have written it like that. Even the parents said I was treated like a child. (Interview #7, p1, 26/10/94)

View of teaching

Diane explained to me that her central goal was for children to enjoy pre-primary. Along with developing self-esteem and socialisation skills, Diane hoped that her pre-primary centre was a fun place to be in, a place that was bright and challenging for the children.

I like the children to enjoy pre-primary. They need to enjoy what they are doing, it might be fun, it might not have a lot of meaning behind it,

but at least they are happy and their self esteem is good and they want to be here and it gives them good grounding for schooling. 60 % of the day might be quality time, and 40% might be happy time. (Interview #1, p1, 10/8/94)

Diane worked closely from the syllabus documents prepared by the state Education Department. She delivered a body of content she referred to as "pre year one concepts such as colour, shape, number". She was also very concerned with "socialisation and the learning of behaviours .... like learning how to behave well and properly or what we consider to be good behaviour for pre-primary" (Interview #4, p3, 31/8/94).

From my experience of being in Diane's classroom, a very important aspect of Diane's role was to fulfil what she perceived were the expectations of the parents and school administration, including the year one teacher. Therefore, a significant proportion of Diane's program revolved around those behaviours which were observable and easily measured and deemed acceptable by adults. The year one teacher had been at the school for many years and the families knew her very well. Consequently, Diane felt the parents "judge me on how well the children come up to the standards set by the year one teacher at the beginning of the year" (Interview #7, p2, 26/10/94). This placed additional pressure and some constraints on Diane. She spoke about the need to satisfy parental expectations and how this effected decisions about her curriculum planning.

Sometimes we have an *upside down day*. I find when I'm stressed and when the children are stressed, I take out all the structured activities and just put out things where they have free choice. The thing I really find hard with that, is the parents. You really have to watch which parents you do it with. I have to watch which parents I have on roster because if

they feel that you are just putting out materials or games for the children I think they think you are slacking off. (Interview #2, p7-8, 17/8/94)

For Diane socialisation was important. She identified skills such as sharing, co-operating, obeying rules and limits and social etiquette as priorities in her program. Diane frequently referred to the importance of respect and the need for manners. She demanded respect from the children in the form of not interrupting and being aware of other peoples' feelings. A great portion of Diane's direct teaching time (mat time) was taken up with protocols such as raising hands to speak, listening to others, taking turns, saying 'please' and 'thank you'.

When describing herself, Diane said she was, "a high energy" teacher who strives to be, "patient, tolerant, but firm". Diane often spoke to me about having fun with the children, yet she kept a tight hold on the control of the group to the extent that she made it difficult for the children to break loose. When her tolerance was tested, her frustration was noticeable. For example, when Diane spoke of a 'naughty' child it was not always clear to me as to what had occurred for the child to earn that title. I observed a particularly quiet and shy Asian boy who rarely mixed with children and found it difficult to engage in group interaction, being labelled as, "having a bad day today and being naughty" (Field notes: 26/10/94). In my view he had appeared particularly sociable and interactive, engaging with and asserting himself in a group.

It was clear to me that Diane had formulated a set of ideal behaviours and standards and a set of qualities for the children she taught, which she deemed necessary and which she aimed to reach by the end of the year. In her endeavour to meet these expectations she described herself as, "interested, enthusiastic and responsive to the children's needs". In addition Diane measured her own success by the following criteria.

> The classroom runs smoothly, and the children are enjoying it. I am doing what the syllabus tells me to do, down to the last activity. My records are all up to date, and daily work pad always done. (Interview #1, p5, 10/8/94)

To Diane doing a good job means, "you follow the syllabus and make sure you cover everything and if you do, you must be doing a good job because you get through the activities with no complaints and the parents are happy" (Interview #1, p5, 10/8/94).

Diane articulated positively about her attitude to teaching. She spoke about being very comfortable in her career and explained, "teaching comes fairly naturally to me". She regarded herself as a perfectionist and this spilled over to her role in the classroom. She liked her classroom work to reflect the highly organised person that she was, with order and organisation being key issues for her.

Notwithstanding her love of teaching, Diane admitted she could not see herself as a pre-primary teacher forever. She knows of, "too many teachers who are stale and boring and don't enjoy their work"(Interview #1, p3, 10/8/94), and reasoned she would leave the profession if she ever got to this stage. In Diane's opinion pre-primary teaching is a physically demanding job, with many expectations being placed on the teacher.

> There are expectations from people when they know you are a teacher. I just don't think I want that for the rest of my life. I've got a lot of other hobbies that I enjoy doing and I think I'd like to do something later on when I feel I become stale. I took a year off three years ago and travelled around the world. I thought I needed to get energy back, even after only 4 years of teaching. (Interview #1, p4, 10/8/94)

At this stage, however, Diane regards teaching as a "life style" where one is a teacher twenty four hours a day, with expectations of how one looks and speaks set by people when they know you are a teacher.

The Setting: Connor Pre-Primary

Connor Pre-Primary is tucked away in the corner of a cul de sac, surrounded by natural garden and enjoys a large open outdoor play area. The centre is separated from the local primary school by approximately 200 meters of native bushland and given this distance between the two schools, the pre-primary centre is regarded as an off-site centre. Connor Pre-Primary is located in what is generally regarded as a middle socio-economic area. The suburb is a mix of the old and the new. Sections of the community cater for state funded housing, whilst in the more recently developed sections opposite a country club huge two storey houses are evident. Also located in this suburb is a substantial residential Bible College. Consequently, Connor draws children from many varied economic, social, cultural and religious backgrounds, thus catering for a diverse population. The centre provides for two groups of children turning five years of age within the year, with each group attending four half day sessions. Group A has nineteen children attending and this was the group I observed over the period of this study.

The building once housed two separate classes, but with the decline in numbers in recent years it now caters for one class and hence the luxury of extra space for both indoor and outdoor activities. The building is purpose built and is in good condition, well-used and well-kept. A wide verandah across the back of the building provides a sheltered outdoor area for working and playing and is used extensively. The outdoor area is extremely spacious, with its undulating landscape and large shady gum trees strategically located throughout the yard. It provides an excellent environment for young

children's play. A large fixed 'jungle gym', a shaded sand pit and a cubby house, all strategically placed, complete the outdoor equipment. In the corner of the yard is a large shed which stores the extensive range of toys, apparatus and equipment used to supplement the outdoor program. Overall, this area gives the feeling of openness and freedom, providing children with an aesthetically pleasing environment.

From the verandah, there are two large sliding doors which lead into the centre. Just inside the main door, is a pin up board which displays photographs of each class member. Inside, the feeling of spaciousness continues. When the central dividing doors are open, which is most of the time, the double classroom area is vast and there is never a sense of overcrowding. At one end of the building are located the washrooms and store rooms. The open space is designed for 'messy' activities such as painting, modelling and constructing and here tables and chairs are set up in small groups for table top activities. There is a large sink in the corner and the floors are covered in linoleum for easy cleaning. Tucked away in the corner, sectioned off from the activity area by child size shelves and furniture, is the 'home corner', an area where dramatic play is the dominant activity. This play area is very popular with the children at Connor and I observed both boys and girls purposefully involved in free dramatic play on many occasions. The 'home corner' contains a wide variety of interesting items, such as dress up clothing, hats, wigs and shoes and often Diane brings personal items from home to stimulate interest. On one particular day she brought an assortment of perfume, soaps, talc and cosmetics which resulted in much excitement and stimulation of activity. Adjacent to the home corner, is a writing centre with several tables and chairs and a range of paper and writing implements, including an old typewriter. On the wall is a chart of the letters of the alphabet for children to use as cues if necessary.

On the opposite side of the building, the room is carpeted with several smaller areas divided into learning centres. These are sections of the room containing specific

materials, equipment and activities, generally linked to a particular area of development or curriculum area and designed for free constructive or manipulative play and self directed activity. The 'learning centres' remain constant with the materials changing over the period of the year in order to fulfil certain learning objectives. Book shelves separate a quiet 'reading corner' where children can comfortably lounge about on cushions and read books at their leisure. The 'block corner' contains a wide range of building and construction materials available on the market and children become engaged in elaborate manipulative activities; a computer stands by the wall, with two or three chairs ready for small groups of children who are expected to share the position of user. The piano is in front of the large open floor space which is used for drama, singing, dance, movement and for coming together as a large group at fruit time. A smaller, more sheltered mat area is used for stories, discussions and conversations. This 'mat area' is semi enclosed by windows on one side, and shelves on the other and provides a bounded, compact area for both the teacher and the children. Mat sessions are regarded by Diane as the most important part of her program and 'the mat' can be described as the 'heart' of Connor Pre-Primary.

As I entered the centre, I did not have a sense of a high level of activity, unlike most pre-primary centres and certainly as was the case with Radford Pre-Primary. This could have been due to the size of the group in relation to the size of the centre. Nonetheless, I experienced a sense of spaciousness as the children spread out to the various sections of the large rooms and the business of the day unfolded at a relatively leisurely pace. The centre was furnished with the standard equipment supplied by the Education Department including child sized tables, chairs and furniture for the 'home corner' and was well stocked with consumable materials subsidised by the Parent Committee. There was evidence of children's work displayed on the walls and hanging from the ceiling. At the beginning of the year Diane conscientiously prepared the display of children's self-portrait work and this display was modified as the year progressed with

minor additions and alterations. Generally, the centre was neat and orderly, with Diane insisting on tidiness and order and the children taking responsibility for clearing away at the end of various sessions.

The half day schedule was typical of traditional Western Australian pre-primary programs. The timetable was divided into relatively small chunks of time which remained largely invariant and consistent from one end of the year to the other. The various components of the schedule were linked together by Diane in what appeared to be a set of smooth, well rehearsed collection of activities and which facilitated a smooth transition through the day for the children. At Connor Pre-Primary the sequence of activities was the same for the morning and afternoon group. The timetable for the afternoon session was as follows:

12.45pm
12.50pm
1.15pm
1.45pm
1.50pm
2.00pm
2.20pm
3.00pm
3.15pm

A Typical Day

As Connor Pre-Primary operated a sessional program, two groups of children came to the centre each day. Diane arrived at approximately 8.20 am and began the day

by setting up the two, planned table top activities, which would be completed by all children over the course of the week. Aided by her assistant, they set out the materials and utensils, unstacked the chairs and prepared the painting area with paper, pots of paint in various primary colours each holding their own brush. This procedure was followed twice a day, before the arrival of each group. Consequently, lunch times for Diane and her assistant were generally spent clearing away and setting up for the next group. Occasionally, they would roster themselves so that one or other could take a break by leaving the centre for a short period of time.

At Connor I observed the afternoon group. Each Wednesday I would arrive just as the midday break was coming to an end. Diane would be attending to last minute arrangements, waiting for the children to appear. Most children arrived at the centre accompanied by an adult, usually a parent, however, there were three children in this group who came from a local day care centre and these children were transported by the day care worker. I would stand back until the formalities began and then I took my place on the fringe of the group, seated on a child-sized chair. Diane always formally introduced all the adults present in the centre and the children responded appropriately. Once the activity period began I would often be asked by Diane to take up a supervisory role with one of the groups. When the prescribed activities were completed and the children moved to free choice, I was able to wander and to interact with children at will. In this way, I became an additional assistant in the centre. I felt useful and at the same time was able to fulfil my personal objectives. Diane and I developed a comfortable relationship. I felt she was at ease in my presence and she was always keen and willing to discuss her practice with me.

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Diane stands by the door to welcome and greet both children and adults. It is a typical routine for welcoming and admitting children into the centre. The conversation is light and informal and first names are used. I noticed that Diane was particularly familiar and friendly with some parents compared to others. She explained she got on very well with several parents on her committee, to the extent that they socialised out of school hours. Whilst the greeting was friendly but brief Diane indicated that should parents wish to discuss general matters regarding their child this would be accommodated. However, I did not observe this occurring frequently.

The children deposited their bags on the racks and made their way to the small mat area where puzzles had been laid out for the children to complete while everyone waited for the stragglers to arrive. Often, several parents stayed and played with their children on the floor. It was a quiet time, a time for gathering and settling before the main activities commenced. Once all children had arrived Diane assumed the central focus. Puzzles were quickly packed away with the help of the assistant and Diane gathered the group together using a number of techniques including rhymes and singing games.

Diane sat at the, "teacher's chair", a normal sized chair situated against the pin up board and along side an easel which would be used as part of the news session at a later time. This marked the beginning of mat time. Diane often spoke of this time as a favourite time of the daily schedule and a very important part of her program. "You're sort of concentrating a lot more at mat time than any other time of the day", she explained. Diane exercised a fair degree of flexibility with this session, and said:

> I try to make it different and change it every day.... I look at my daily work pad and think, oh well, if it's not going to be interesting we won't talk about that and usually something else comes up." (Interview #2, p3, 17/8/94))

Diane explained to me that 'mat time' was a time for doing things that she thought the children would enjoy and which would gain their interest. Her aim was to encourage children to interact and to actively participate in the session. However, a high degree of teacher direction was evident to me during these sessions with Diane being the centre of attention, conducting the proceedings and always maintaining control of the level of talk and interaction. There was not a significant amount of content knowledge being transmitted during these sessions but when incidental topics arose, Diane consciously slipped into spontaneous teaching mode and was able to use an effective strategy for that moment. Often these occurrences were unplanned and arose from the children, yet Diane expertly conjured up an appropriate game, song or story to embellish her performance.

Diane talked about working with themes. She explained that she liked to find out what interested the children and then included these themes into her program and over the period of observation I noted the use of several key themes. The major calendar celebrations such as St Valentine's Day, Easter, Father's Day and Christmas were clearly evident in Diane's classroom. In addition, the school calendar's major events were also celebrated, including, 'Book Week', sports day, assembly presentation, parent's night, and Western Australia Week. However, what was not very prominent, was the inclusion of topics or themes generated to stimulate children's interests. The only theme of this type I observed was the theme of Dinosaurs. Diane initiated this theme at the same time in both years in which I was on observer in her classroom. The children at Connor were very knowledgable about Dinosaurs and it was a very popular topic judging by the level of discussion and interest shown by both Diane and the children. The book corner was filled with books on this topic and many children added to this collection with books from home. A display table was set up with posters, toys and models depicting the full variety of dinosaurs and the children enjoyed talking about the various species and playing with these at various times throughout the day.

The session began with the formal greeting of all present in the centre and this was followed by a range of informal, incidental activities most often incorporating skills and concepts which Diane regarded as important for pre-primary. At this time, Diane encouraged conversation and communication, although it was well controlled by her, and followed a question and answer format. Length of mat time varied according to Diane's plan for the day and on the attention of the children. Activities ranged from spontaneous games, rhymes and jingles, to planned experiences which develop memory skills, recognition of colours, letters and numbers. In most cases mat sessions took the form of sharing accounts and extending general knowledge by recalling simple concepts and facts on a range of incidental topics. At all times Diane emphasised manners and courtesy and constantly reinforced children for appropriate behaviour such as sitting still, putting their hand up, not calling out, taking turns and being polite.

Activity time was made up of both directed and free choice activities. Firstly, children were instructed to complete set, teacher planned activities and then they were free to choose to work in any of the learning centres which were a constant feature of the classroom. Generally, three table top activities were planned and these remained constant over the week until all children had completed them. The activities were generally manipulative type experiences and represented the mandatory, prescriptive part of the program, and whilst the activities changed, the mandate did not. Children would cut, paste, draw, colour and make, usually to a prescribed model, and requiring little creative or individualised effort. Once the children had completed their set activity they moved to the learning centre of their choice. At this point it was as if the children were released both mentally and physically as they took control of their own interests. They moved with great enthusiasm and excitement to their preferred activity. The home corner became a place of intense activity, the play was animated and intensive. Boys and girls take on a range of roles and the props provided the means for imaginative and creative interpretations. The block corner was dominated by boys, who quickly set up elaborate

systems of roads, bridges and buildings and cars and trucks were moved about in sophisticated constructions. Several children moved to the painting area, where paper and paints were ready and began to experiment with colours and shapes. The computer, as always, attracted a small group and these children took turns to operate the keyboard, amicably setting their own rules and expertly following the computer program. The construction table, laden with an array of cardboard boxes, paper and various containers, also attracted attention, as did the play dough table and these areas were frequently visited by children throughout the course of activity time.

Generally, this period of the day was marked by high levels of language, as the talk became lively and animated The children were in the period of the day which allowed them to break out of the relatively tight parameters held by Diane. However, this was not to say that the children became undisciplined or uncontrollable. Diane still maintained a strong overall check on the happenings in the classroom. She moved about the various groups offering assistance, questioning and facilitating the play, but most of all she monitored the behaviour and reinforced the rules.

As activity time drew to a close, the children were instructed to pack up. Everyone contributed to this chore and the area was left with all resources and equipment packed away and chairs stacked for the convenience of the cleaner at the end of the school day. Children lined up at the edge of the carpet ready to be moved into the main open space for music. Diane had developed a method that captured the children's attention, added variation and fun for the children, yet fulfilled her aim of moving children in an orderly, controlled fashion. On this day, children lined up at the edge of the carpeted area with a nominated leader while Diane waited until all had returned from the bathroom. She called the children's attention with a game of 'Simon Says' and when all were settled and attentive, she instructed the children on what to do and began one of a number of methods to move the children. On this occasion they all linked with the person in front

and with the teacher becoming the leader, they sang their dinosaur song, and snaked up and down, in and around the classroom finally stopping in front of the piano.

One by one the children assembled ready for music. This period was obviously enjoyed by all participants and was a special time of the day for Diane and the children. It took the form of musical games, movement, singing and use of musical instruments. Diane used the tape recorder for accompaniment and also played the piano with skill. She had a pleasant melodious voice and obviously derived great pleasure from the music sessions. The children participated with enthusiasm and became totally engrossed. Sometimes these sessions were tightly planned as when the children were rehearsing for an assembly item to be performed at the primary school and other times Diane took the children through a collection of known songs and musical games in an ad hoc kind of way, but always extremely well managed. During music Diane again became the focal point and assumed the role of director.

From music the children took up various positions on the floor ready for snack time. Sometimes they sat in a large circle and other times they were allocated to small groups either on the floor or at tables. These variations occurred according to the time of the year, which Diane linked to developmental stages of the children. Snack time occurred at the mid point of the afternoon session. At most pre-primary centres it is a daily occurrence and occupies a fixed spot in the daily timetable. Whilst other sessions may be altered this particular set of actions would be the one less likely to change and the remainder of the timetable appears to revolve around it. The tradition at Connor Pre-Primary is for snack time to begin with a "Thank You" song, which Diane explained is the socially acceptable expectation of the community which, "is quite religious in its outlook". This beginning was introduced on the first day of school and had become a consistent feature of the performance. The fruit was prepared by the parent helper and placed on two large trays. The leader for the day had the privilege of selecting someone

to help them and together they took a tray each and passed the fruit around the group. When each child had selected a piece of fruit then the trays were placed in the middle of the group for children to help themselves. Diane varied this routine throughout the year "to add a little interest". For example, she reported that she had planned the following pattern for variety. "Monday is fruit day, Tuesday is cheese and biscuits day, Wednesday is sandwich day, and Thursday is also a fruit day." As the year draws to an end the children will bring their personal snacks from home in their lunch box just as they will be doing in year one".

At the conclusion of snack time, the children made the transition to outdoor play. At Connor Pre-Primary this session was generally unplanned and unstructured. The permanent equipment in the playground was used and the children played freely on the fort, swings and climbing frame. Occasionally, extra equipment was brought out, like trucks, bikes, hoops and balls but this mostly depended on Diane's whim. The outdoor play allowed children to let off steam and the adults to take a break. Supervision was carried out diligently and thoroughly, sometimes by the teacher and sometimes by the assistant, however, it was to watch for potentially dangerous situations and mostly it was conducted from the boundaries of the group. Diane considered outdoor play as a vital component of the children's physical development. At three o'clock the children were called to attention, lined up and returned to the classroom to prepare for dismissal.

With bags by their side Diane closed the day with story time. Generally, Diane chose the story for the day, but occasionally a child had brought a favourite story book to school and this was shared with the group. In most instances, Diane read the story, from cover to cover, with little interaction from the group. At the end she asked several questions recalling facts about the story and level of enjoyment experienced by the children. This was a quiet, subdued way to end the day and to wait for the parents to arrive. Diane liked, "to have the children settled and calm before handing them back to the parents". As each adult arrived at the door, Diane called the child's name, "Michelle,

Mummy is here". The child jumped up and ran to greet her mother. Diane was very conscious of ending the day on a quiet but positive note. She wanted the children to have a sense of satisfaction and of anticipation for the coming day.

Rituals in Connor Pre-Primary

For Diane and the children, pre-primary is a 'rite of passage'. It is a preparation period for the real work of school which Diane has come to understand begins in year one. Diane's central aim of, "getting the children ready for year one" was influenced greatly by expectations placed on her by external sources. She strove to prove herself as both a competent and effective pre-primary teacher. However, her confidence had been undermined as her former principal made 'commando raids' into her centre to check on her program and on the progress the children were making. New innovation had to be reported to this principal and her permission sought for every small detail. This practice was foreign to Diane and after the freedom and support of her first school, she felt intimidated and insecure. Diane did not feel as though she had the opportunity to make decisions for herself, or to feel valued for what she did. All these factors contributed to a lack of self confidence in Diane stating and backing her personal views of education and teaching, and resulted in her being particularly obsessed with meeting the expectations of the hierarchy.

From the beginning of the year Diane set in motion a number of repetitive performances which were responsible for transmitting the ethos of Connor Pre-Primary. Diane's personal beliefs and understandings about what was important and how life should be in pre-primary were conveyed through the rehearsed procedures. Diane had a strong need to control the situation, to be seen to be efficient, well organised and effective in her teaching, thus she put in place a style of teaching which made her appear competent . She perceived the qualities of 'good teacher' as manifesting themselves in obedient

children, conformity, order and control. She felt most in control when children were in a large group on the mat and consequently a large portion of her program was delivered in this configuration. These pressures influenced Diane's program to the extent that she set in motion the rituals and patterns of action which would result in her meeting her goals.

Coming to school: Parents escort their children through the side gate, to the entrance of the centre. Here Diane stands to greet the parents as they arrive with their children. She is bright and cheerful, smiling and chatting to individuals as they approach the entrance. The greeting and response to and from the children are casual and informal yet patterned and rehearsed.

> "Hello Joshua, how are you today?"
>
> "Good," replies Joshua.
>
> "Hello Jenny, "(Joshua's mother)
>
> "Hello Diane," replies Jenny. (Field Notes: p8, 24/8/94)

Diane acknowledges a number of parents in this brief but friendly manner. She keeps her position by the door, and at this point the parent "hands over" the child to her. Diane makes a point of getting to know all parents on a first name basis and insists that they call her by her first name. Most parents do not stay long, yet it is not unusual for several parents to wander in and sit on the floor with their child as they work with the puzzles. These parents enter the centre, accompany their child to the bathroom area to hang up their bag, then move to the large carpeted floor area where appropriate puzzles have been placed on the shelf or laid out on the floor for children to use. Small groups form on the floor, with children slowly gravitating towards one another, although each child is working individually on a puzzle. Diane calls this period, "a time for calming the children down, and ensuring that the day begins on a quiet note". As they work their way through several puzzles, the talk is calm and moderate as children assist each other and talk to one another whilst demonstrating their speed and ability to complete the

puzzles. Diane sits cross legged in the middle of the floor and is quickly surrounded by children, some just chatting others seeking her involvement in their play. Her facial expressions are animated and her voice communicates warmth and interest in the children. The conversation ranges across various topics, from what the children have seen on television, to personal anecdotes about family life. Gradually, the parents slip away unobtrusively with a kiss, hug and wave. Puzzle time is a waiting time, waiting for the final stragglers to arrive and particularly waiting for the 'Day Care' children to be deposited by bus. It is also a time for making the transition to school mode. When every one is present, Diane rings the bell for pack away time, and quickly gathers the children on the mat, assumes her position in the teacher's chair, and begins the formal greeting for the day.

"Good afternoon everyone,"

"Good afternoon Miss Sullivan."

" How are you today?"

"Very well thank you."

"Let's say good afternoon to Mrs Riley (teacher assistant), she has beautiful dangling ear rings on today."

"Good afternoon Mrs Riley," respond the children.

"We have Joshua's mum on roster today. Good afternoon Mrs Branston."

"Good afternoon Mrs Branston," mimic the children

"And we have Mrs Maloney with us again today," she adds.

"Good afternoon Mrs Maloney," reply the children.

"I am pleased you have remembered your manners today," adds Diane.

(Field Notes: p10, 31/8/94)

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This entrance procedure remained unchanged over the entire period I observed at Connor and Diane never altered the pattern. Greeting children at the door and directing children to the 'mat area', a confined space, and limiting the range of activities enabled Diane to easily oversee the group, to assert her expectations and to maintain control thus beginning her day "on a quiet note". This order was quickly established at the beginning of the year and maintained for the remainder of the year. Diane worked to establish her dominance and to assert her power as teacher in charge.

Socialising children

For Diane, socialisation is a key priority. She categorises socialisation as showing respect for peers and for the teacher functioning effectively in a group, and having manners.

> We really concentrate a lot on socialisation and learning behaviours, like learning how to behave well or properly or what we consider to be good behaviours for pre-primary. That's why mat time is the first part of the day and they are together as a group and I find it important because if you can grab them altogether first and go through all the rules and all your socialising, and all your manners and everything first it usually sets a good standard for the rest of the day. (Interview #4, p5. 31/8/94)

It is not surprising then, that a significant part of Diane's program relates to control of the group and to setting down limits and boundaries and expecting children to conform to these. Over fifty percent of the daily timetable at Connor is spent in a whole group configuration, where Diane orchestrates the events. Whole group time, which is repeatedly identified by Diane as her favourite part of the day, provides the context for teaching the children how to behave at school and also acts as a show piece for Diane,

where she can exhibit her teaching skills. For the children, being on the mat symbolises a time when they need to behave in a particular way and they can expect that the teacher will also behave in a certain way. Whole group time enables Diane to communicate her beliefs and expectations to the congregation. More importantly, whole group time enables Diane to display her teaching strength which lies in her communication skills and in the way she makes contact with the children. These skills are at their best during whole group sessions and therefore it is not surprising that Diane structures her program around these types of encounters.

Children come together on the mat for a wide range of activities including, discussions, stories, music, recitation and snack and for beginning and ending the day. When children assemble together on the mat, they sit in a particular way, legs crossed and hands in their lap and they randomly choose a place to sit close to the teacher's chair. The length of mat time varies according to Diane's preparedness and plan for the day and on the attention of the children.

Mat Time: Mat time occurs in most cases at the beginning of a session. There is no doubt that mat time has a significant and definite purpose for Diane. She likes to be in control and it is during mat time that she feels she has this control. She directs a collection of procedures which transmit a set of messages about the culture; the certain beliefs, ideas, 'laws and ways of doing'; which have become part of the learned patterns of behaviour for the children of Connor Pre-Primary.

Mat time takes place on the large carpeted area of the centre reserved specifically for whole group floor activities. It is especially recognised by the children as a place where everyone gathers together and that the teacher will be the centre of attention. Activities range from spontaneous games, rhymes and jingles, to planned experiences which develop memory skills, recognition of colours, letters and numbers. In most cases

mat sessions take the form of sharing accounts, encouraging language and probing or assessing children's knowledge and recall of simple concepts and facts. At all times Diane emphasises manners and courtesy and constantly reinforces children for appropriate behaviour such as sitting still, putting their hand up, not calling out, and being polite.

Mat time is a time when Diane sets the tone for the remainder of the day. She settles, sets rules and moulds the children into 'school behaviour'. Diane calls on a repertoire of strategies which she has designed to orient the children to the group and the day's program. The children conform extremely well and know the implicit rules for mat time. They sit still, cross-legged; they do not call out; they put their hand up to speak; they wait their turn; and they use their manners, saying thank you, please, and excuse me in the right places. The children are constantly, positively reinforced for using all these correct conventions by being praised and being used as a model for those not conforming. Diane uses mat time to teach a number of things she considers important in her pre-primary program. Primarily she is concerned with developing social skills, those skills regarded by the year one teacher as important. During mat time the children are being trained to sit still and be attentive. Furthermore, they are learning to acquire manners, something which is rated exceptionally high by Diane.

Children pack away the puzzles and gather in random order on the mat in time to Diane's jingle and quietly wait for her to begin.

"David come and sit here so I can see your beautiful eyes," says Diane.

"Let me see your beautiful smiles, everyone. Good afternoon everyone."

"Good afternoon Miss Sullivan, how are you today?" ask the children.

"I'm very well thank you, and how are you?", replies Diane.

"Very well thank you." (Field Notes: p8, 24/8/94)

Diane uses mat time to get to know the children well and for the children to get to know her as well. She tells them a lot about her personal life and in turn asks questions about their families, their interests and every day events that make up their lives. She encourages open communication and says she, "wants the children to know the *real* me, and not just the teacher part of me". Diane begins with informally chatting about a personal issue. "I'm very happy today because in two sleeps David (fiance) will be home. And in seven sleeps, what will be special for you?" She points to a child with their hand up. "Yes Rebecca?" "It will be Father's Night," replies Rebecca. "Yes, that's right, good girl Rebecca. If I have seven sleeps and I take one sleep away, how many will I have left?" The children quickly put their hands up. One child calls out the answer. "No, Jamie, I would ask you if you put your hand up." The conversation about Father's Night continues, the preparations they have made, what they will do, and the surprise they have ready for Dad on the night (Field Notes: p8, 24/8/94).

"Now I want you to put on your listening ears" says Diane. "We are going to see how clever we can be. I have lots of things on this tray and I am going to show them to you and ask you if you can tell me what they were." The tray is exposed and the children are given a brief period to observe the items, before Diane covers them over again. She then proceeds to go around the group, asking children with their hand up what they saw on the tray. This activity is repeated several times, before Diane changes the strategy and this time takes an item away and asks children to tell her which one she has removed. The discussion is punctuated with comments from Diane such as; "We try not to call out," "Too many talking at once, Jack's got his hand up," "I can't hear Mary's answer," "Brendon is sitting beautifully," "Lovely manners Kristy," "Excuse me Kathryn, I'm speaking," "Two people speaking at once," "Paul, you have had your turn," " Well done Sam," "Peter are you listening to Jennifer?"

The session is relaxed as the children interject with personal stories, some related to the topic at hand and others not. Diane orchestrates the informal talk. She decides which stories are worth listening to and questions and probes, or quickly brings the conversation back to the task if she deems the conversation inappropriate. There is a certain formula which forms boundaries within which the children come to know and understand how Diane operates, what is acceptable and how they should conduct themselves within the context of this classroom.

During the discussion, Diane is in complete charge. She directs questions to check, recall and to monitor attention and behaviour. She accentuates the skills required to function democratically in a group and targets behaviours such as cooperating, sharing time, obeying rules and limits, and general social etiquette. She comments on this part of her program as follows:

> I would much rather teach these children social behaviours and the general etiquette rather than teach them anything else. I couldn't care less if they couldn't count to ten by the end of the year, but if they were going into year one and their social behaviours were really acceptable, that would make we very happy. (Interview #9, p3, 14/2/95)

For Diane, whole group sessions such as mat time, music time, story time and fruit time, put her in charge. She is the focus of attention, but more importantly she is able to dictate the terms. Depending on her disposition for the day, she sets the tone, level of activity, degree of freedom and involvement. When observations were conducted one year later, I noted that Diane's program had not altered significantly. She operated in a similar style and emphasised the same priorities.

Surprise bag: The 'surprise bag' is a way for the children to share news, and has evolved as a format from the First Steps Program, an early language development initiative currently being promoted by the Education Department of Western Australia. Here, Diane nominates a child to have a turn at taking home the surprise bag and returning it the next day with three objects inside which will be shared and discussed with the group. On arrival at school, Matthew has placed the 'surprise bag' by the teacher's chair and has attempted to write a list of the objects on the notice board ready for news time. Now the children are seated on the mat, and with the formal greeting and teacher directed activity over, attention is drawn to the notice board and Matthew, standing by the teacher, is ready to discuss his news. Diane asks the class to 'read' the word "Fennel" written by Matthew. After much sounding and guessing, Diane finally asks Matthew what it could be. Out of the surprise bag Matthew presents a cutting of a green plant.

> "It's fennel," says Matthew
>
> "Can I ask a question?" asks Diane, "Do I need to put my hand up?" Raising her hand as she speaks.
>
> "What kind of plant is it, Matthew?"
>
> "You eat it when you're not eating," replies Matthew.
>
> "Oh, do you mean that we would eat it when it is mixed in with something else?" asks Diane. Matthew gives her the plant and Diane takes a small piece to taste the plant.
>
> "Mmm it tastes like licorice," says Diane, and proceeds to pass small pieces around the group for children to taste.
>
> "It has a lovely smell too," adds Diane. (Field Notes: p19, 26/10/94)

The children pass the plant around and taste and smell as Matthew explains that it grows in his garden and that his mother puts it in her cooking. Diane methodically nominates children to ask questions and to make comments and a discussion develops with the

children giving their opinion and views on the fennel. The session concludes with Matthew selecting the next person to take home the 'surprise bag'.

Snack Time: Snack time represents a break in the day's program, with the children and adults coming together on the floor in a circle and sharing food, time, and interactions. Talk flows freely and informally and children become engrossed in the chatter about the days events, home events, and general interests. At Connor Pre-Primary there are no strict rules regarding this conversation, except that Diane keeps a close check on boisterous behaviour and closely monitors conventions such as manners and courtesy. The space is large enough for all children to sit comfortably in a large circle, or in small groups.

Traditionally, each child brings a piece of fruit to school and as they enter the classroom it is placed in a bowl close to the entrance. Diane has extended and varied the snack to include greater variety, with children being asked to bring fruit on Mondays and Thursdays, sandwiches on Tuesdays, and cheese and biscuits on Wednesdays.

Snack time occurs at the mid point of the morning or afternoon session. It is a daily occurrence and occupies a fixed place in the daily timetable. In my experience, it is a part of the daily schedule which is never abandoned. Whilst other sessions may be altered, this tradition would be the one less likely to be omitted and the remainder of the timetable is organised around it. For Diane and the adults in the centre, snack time is a time of respite, whilst for the children it represents a break in the timetable, a 'rest and refuelling' time. At Connor Pre-primary all activities cease and the children assemble on the floor generally sitting in a large circle. Several conversations go on at once, rather than one large group conversation and the children quickly become involved in talking to neighbours or interacting across the group. The noise level rises to a feverish pitch with laughter, excitement, interest, and sharing. All children participate freely in the incidental talk. Here, there is no formal structure, no putting up of hands, no turn taking.

However, Diane does not deviate from her norms in relation to manners and courtesies. She continually insists on 'please' and 'thank you' and rules regarding the taking and eating of food are explicitly reinforced. Diane expertly scans the group as she monitors these behaviours and initiates conversations. It is a relaxed time of the day and there is a sense of community. Diane uses this time to talk informally to the children, she questions, probes, and stimulates discussion on a wide range of topics most of which are superficial pleasantries.

Steven's mother is on duty today, and so Steven is the leader for the day. When the sandwiches, which have been brought by the children, are set out on the tray and the fruit is cut into small manageable pieces, Diane asks Steven to choose a friend to help him. Together they carry the tray and place it in the middle of the circle. Diane, seated on the floor with legs crossed, the same as the children, leads the children in the "Thank You Prayer". This was a feature of fruit time which remained constant over the entire period of my observations. The whole group joins in with enthusiasm, accompanied by clapping and knee tapping to the rhythm of the song. Now the children are ready for their snack and Diane instructs Steven to invite the children to begin afternoon tea. "Would you like to have afternoon tea Joshua?" asks Steven. "Could I have a sandwich, please?" asks Joshua. As Steven nods, Joshua moves to the centre of the circle to take a sandwich. Diane remarks on the "beautiful manners" displayed by Joshua, and this prompts other children to follow his example. Slowly each child is invited in this manner. When everyone has had a turn there is an open invitation for the children to help themselves. During this period the conversations gather momentum.

> "Who brought the vegemite?" "I did". "I brought the nutella". "That is my favourite". "What did you bring Eva?" "I brought the egg." There is talk about the weekend activities, about the recent Royal Show, television programs, shopping, buying a new case for school.

"My sister hit her head on the monkey bars and had to have special staples".

"I've got special climbing shoes on today."

"Yes, they are your new shoes," adds Diane.

"Do I have to take them off to climb?" "No I don't think so, they look good for climbing" replies Diane. (Field Notes: p6-7, 17/8/94)

The children chat to their neighbour and to those across the group. They talk freely and comfortably to adults and there are no restrictions unless the behaviour is disorderly or disruptive. There is a distinct feeling of relaxation within some broad restrictive boundaries imposed by Diane, who uses this time to make informal links with children in an effort to get to know them better on a personal level. Whilst I noted that Diane had a particular agenda in mind, she also allowed the children to take the lead and to initiate particular conversations to which she reacted.

When all the food is eaten, Diane begins the dismissal procedure. This varies from day to day, but today, Diane chooses to use a signal to indicate that the children may leave the group. "When I wink at you like this... then you must wink back to me and then I'll nod my head and that means you can get ready for play" explains Diane. There is much giggling and laughter, as the children attempt to control their wink and to respond to Diane. She dismisses the children by instructing them to take their hats from their bags and to line up at the door (Field Notes: p7, 17/8/94). The parent helper takes the empty tray to the kitchen and begins clearing away. The children make their way to the playground for outdoor play.

Snack time is described by the teacher as an important time of the day. The coming together is regarded as a learning experience in its own right and provides an opportunity for socialising. The sharing of the snack enables the children to take the

initiative in many ways. The talk most often is child-initiated and child-directed, conducted on an informal basis and covering a wide range of topics including manners, sharing personal anecdotes and daily happenings. The teacher takes the opportunity to make transitions between incidental talk, reinforcement of norms and personal praise for efforts and accomplishments.

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For Diane, teaching is a display of power and control. The mat is symbolic of community and sharing, but also of status. The children sit on the mat and the teacher sits on an adult sized chair, leading the congregation. The chair is 'sacred' in that children were seen objecting strongly if other children used the 'teacher's chair'. Whole group time was used as a measure of how ready the children are for year one; whether children could listen attentively, put their hand up when they wished to speak and the degree to which they could sit still for lengthy periods of time and display good manners and concentration. This measure is used by the year one teacher and so Diane worked relentlessly to prepare her children to meet these criteria.

> In the first couple of weeks of the new year I always spend Friday morning with my last years group in Year 1 as a follow up. The year one teacher does a lot of work on the mat, and if they can sit and concentrate, the year one teacher tends to think they are more ready. (Interview #2, p1/2, 17/8/94)

These skills are explained, reinforced and adhered to by Diane from the very first day of the school year. During an observation conducted in the first week of the school year, mat time was being used by Diane to lay down the rules for the centre.

"We have special things we do at pre-primary and these are called rules. What is a rule?" asks Diane

"When children be naughty," responds Daniel.

"Something like that, our rule is NO running in pre-primary and we also have a special time to talk and the easiest way for me to know if it is your turn is to put your hand up. Inside we talk with soft voices. No shouting because it could scare me. I shouldn't need to remind you about manners, you should remember." (Field Notes: p29, 1/2/95)

To me, as an observer it appeared that the aim of getting children ready for school was a relatively simple one for Diane. By the end of the first month of school, it was obvious that the children were able to meet the criteria set down by Diane, at a relatively sophisticated level of competence. The remainder of the year was spent in maintaining the status quo.

Teacher as skilled performer

When observations were conducted one year later, I noted that Diane's program had not altered significantly. The theme of dinosaurs had been observed at the same period the year before, and similar activities were being completed by the children. However, what was just as striking was Diane's ability to engage the children in a number of simple yet structured games and activities which she called her "time fillers". She described these as:

They are very impromptu but I do it a lot. I come up with different routines and things to do. If too much is planned it can become too boring, structured and organised. For example the way I move children from one area to another, with the games we play, or waiting for the

> group, they are little techniques that are fun, something different. (Interview #6, p1-2, 19/10/94)

Diane's strength lay in her communication skills and ability to empathise with children. Conversation with children was natural yet sincere and always with an element of humour. She felt she was in tune with this particular age group and "knows what five year olds are like."

Diane wanted to be recognised as an efficient and effective teacher and believed that this recognition would come if she could, "keep the centre running smoothly." In her eyes this meant that children should be seen to be conforming to limits, as this would be good grounding for later years at school.

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Transitions: Diane's repertoire of techniques for moving children from one spot to another is varied and has elements of fun and novelty, but it also has strong elements of order and control. The strategies used are not pre-planned by Diane, but rather they are spur of the moment ideas which emerge from the situation and are effective in fulfilling her objectives. Diane performs for the children, but also for the adults who may be watching in the centre. She explains:

> It's nice to think my children are nicely mannered and well behaved and they can do as they are told when they are asked especially if you have got visitors coming into the room.... I think it reflects.... like if your kids are running riot it reflects on you as a bad teacher. (Interview #5, p2, 7/9/94)

Today, as the children pack up their activities, Diane waits at the edge of the carpet. Slowly the children return from the bathroom and begin to make a line. The leader is always the child whose parent is on roster for the day. Ben lines up first, and the other children make a single line behind him. As they wait, they shuffle, and push in for a more advantageous position. Diane waits, and when the majority of the children are present, she suddenly begins a song to call for their attention.

"Can you hear me, can you hear me?"

"Yes I can, yes I can," (chant the whole group)

"Jasmine can you hear me, Jasmine can you hear me,"

"Yes I can, yes I can." (Field Notes: p16, 19/10/94)

With this, the children stand still in line and quietly wait for further directions. "Let me see, I think today, we will have an obstacle course," announces Diane. Quickly a chair, table, toy truck, and easel are gathered up and placed in a line in the open area of the centre, in front of the group. "Today, we are going to go over the chair, under the table, around the truck, and through the easel, and sit on the mat in front of the piano. Ready, off we go, one at a time" (Field Noted p17 19/10/94). The children file one by one through the obstacle course and make their way to the music area. With this procedure, and many similar ones, Diane reinforces her need for order, and method. Over the period of observation, a number of varied techniques were noted illustrating Diane's extensive repertoire of strategies but always achieving her goal.

Summary

Diane's personal view of pre-primary significantly influenced her method of operating. She established her pedagogy based on what she perceived to be the expectations of both parents and school personnel. Her concern was with preparing children for year one and keeping children well controlled. She met these demands

through ritualised practice. Diane's teaching was structured and arranged and she took the role of controller in the classroom, carefully orchestrating children's movement, and activity.

CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In the previous three chapters I have given accounts of what it was like to be in each of the three pre-primary settings. In this chapter I take an analytical approach and provide an overview of how the three teachers used ritual as part of their pedagogy. In analysing the extent to which ritual serves a pedagogical purpose in pre-primary settings, I intend to explore the distinctive features of ritual found in the three case studies and how these compared and contrasted within the three settings. The various dimensions of ritual which are discussed, such as the role of ritual, the form, function and content of ritual emanate from the conceptual framework of the study and are used to provide a framework for the discussion.

My experience of visiting pre-primary centres over many years has left me with the concept that despite the overt similarities in structure and function of pre-primary centres there exists in reality significant differences in how pre-primary teachers go about their work. On the surface there appears a notable degree of sameness about the setting, culture, how children operate and how teachers operate, whilst variations exist in the way teachers make decisions, choose content, formulate curriculum and implement plans. It was this question of sameness and uniformity in pre-primary settings which provided the impetus for this exploratory study. In analysing the role of ritual in Radford, Swanleigh

and Connor it is intended to explore the interplay between ritual and pedagogy thus describing and interpreting pre-primary teachers' classroom practice. Moreover, this exploration makes explicit the complex range of teachers' intentions, knowledge and understandings of pedagogy, beliefs and practices that go beyond the notion of common sense.

How Pre-Primary Teachers Use Ritual

Each teacher in this study established different ways of going about the business of teaching based on a set of professional knowledge they brought to teaching. Each teacher's social and cultural background together with knowledge gained from training, life experiences, views and assumptions of childhood and of teaching, contributed to a construction of early childhood education. Based on their individual pool of knowledge, the teachers developed theoretical assumptions; a pedagogical ideology including goals, intentions, objectives and strategies for practice; perceptions of what is educationally and morally sound; and a set of criteria for assessing what is happening. This accounted for different forms of ritual being put in place by the teachers and for their different functions. Hence, for the three teachers, the repetitive daily patterns, such as mat time, activity time, snack time, outdoor time, resulted in formalising the timetable and setting in place clear models for operating and the ritualisation of these events resulted in predictability and familiarisation.

Helen

Helen had been a teacher at Radford Pre-Primary for 20 years. She had achieved a high level of status and prestige in her career and was regarded as a highly skilled

professional. At Radford, Helen displayed a strong commitment to her program and to the formula she had established on a daily, weekly and yearly basis. Although this overall daily, weekly and yearly structure remained constant and was a striking feature of her practice, there were variations in the curriculum content and the pedagogical techniques she used. These variations were in response to local policy reforms being advocated at the time in early childhood education in Western Australia and also for purposes which Helen described as, 'for the good of the children'.

Helen was particularly skilled at using rituals to establish a strong sense of a bonded community. She manipulated the rituals which remained largely unchanged in order to draw together certain objectives about, "sharing and caring", about classroom behaviours and of establishing relationships that she deemed appropriate. However, within her ritualised framework, she made choices which resulted in variations that made the experience a profound one. For example, her roll call, conducted every morning as an opening activity to the mat session, was highly valued by her and the children. She had introduced a number of alternatives which she described as, "maintaining interest." As expressed by Helen,

> Rituals set a framework for my teaching and I can build around them. I find I need to vary them so there is always an interest there. Sometimes I use the train chart, sometimes I go up the chart and sometimes I go down, and like today, I made a big deal about the new boy and where we would put his name on the chart. We talked about having it in alphabetical order and so I could go off on a tangent there. I change things not just for the children, but for my sake too, because I don't particularly like getting into a rut or doing the same thing over and over. (Interview #5, p2-3, 29/8/94)

Greeting and mat sessions : It was through these rituals that Helen built her view of community. She made herself readily available to welcome the children and parents to the centre each day and regarded this time as critical for orienting herself to the needs and disposition of the class members. Mat time represented Helen's key teaching time. Here she imparted a store of content related to specific outcomes and intentions. In addition, it was a time to build relationships and to induct the children into the day's proceedings. Through whole group gatherings, Helen was able to address the collective, assert her influence and establish her community ethos.

Theme work: For Helen, theme work was sacred and formed the cornerstone of her program. This component was laden with facts and general knowledge which Helen categorised as important. Through her ritual of theme work, which persisted for over 20 years, Helen established her reputation and the tradition for which Radford Pre-Primary was known. She was most reluctant to alter the goals she held for this work and the manner in which she went about delivering the content. Consequently, this aspect of her program remained invariant and the ritual of theme work was associated with a particular kind of content and met certain educational ends which she valued and regarded as worthwhile.

Activity Time: The learning experiences planned for the children during activity time related directly to the theme work and were a reflection of Helen's commitment to certain bodies of knowledge which are repeated consistently from year to year. Over the course of observations in Helen's classroom I noted a pattern whereby activities associated with particular themes were repeated with very little variation. There was clear evidence of aging and extensive use of many of the teaching materials, reinforcing for me the degree to which Helen attached significance to particular activities which she considered important and which she therefore repeated year after year.

Fruit time: This ritual represented a formalised part of the daily schedule which did not vary over the period of observation. Helen offered an explanation for the ritual of fruit time which was based on a personal view of what she considered was best for the children and for her. She used the fruit time ritual as a method for fulfilling several objectives. Fruit time, represented a transition in the morning program; an unstated break in the morning's activity. It enabled children to come together to share food, to communicate on a social level, to move out of school mode into social mode, and to switch from one form of activity to the next phase of the day.

Outdoor play: Although the children engaged in free spontaneous play during this part of the program, there were clear and explicit goals for outdoor play which Helen outlined in her program. The materials and equipment matched these goals and provided a boundary for the children to work within. The preparation of the outdoor area was a ritual in itself. Helen arrived early to prepare the outdoor environment which she regarded as an extension of the total learning environment. She carefully chose equipment to compliment her learning objectives and at the same time she encouraged free play and use of initiative and imagination.

Story time: This was a ritual which remained constant and unchanged. Story time was highly valued by Helen. She was committed to literature and enjoyed telling and reading stories to children. Helen had other reasons for calling children together at story time which occurred twice throughout the day. She used it as a time to draw the group together under her supervision and to settle the children before moving to the next part of the schedule. It became a quiet sharing time, a time when discussion and conversation was encouraged within and beyond the boundary of the story.

Helen's pedagogy was highly refined, repetitive, organised and systematic. It reflected this teacher's personal beliefs and understanding of early childhood education;

that children develop in stages, at individual rates and that the teacher's role is to provide appropriate experiences for these stages of development. In addition, Helen's teaching reflected her understanding that school is an extension of the home and therefore should be a warm caring nurturing environment where children were safe both physically and psychologically. This was the premise upon which Helen had operated for the past 20 years and upon which she had constructed her method of teaching. Nevertheless, Helen did embrace the new. In recent years, system wide changes had been incorporated into her program and she willingly accepted and incorporated program innovations such as First Steps (language program).

The children at Radford Pre-Primary worked within the formula set up by Helen. The formula had become a tradition for this teacher, for the centre, and for the district. Despite the framework set in place by Helen, she was able to work within and around the rituals in that she varied and manipulated basic structures to meet certain goals and intentions.

Jean

Jean, as the owner and key teacher of Swanleigh Montessori school, operated within a highly ritualised set of procedures which were clearly visible to the observer. The environment was highly structured and the rules were clearly specified for the children. The children worked within a strict formula regarding behaviour code, work ethic and procedures to be followed. She describes her teaching as follows:

> The classroom set up in the broad term is part of my ritual, and the classroom has to be set this way for it to work. It is set along Montessori lines and is a basic part of what I do (Interview #5 p1 30/8/94).

> The ritual of Montessori is, 'this is' 'show me' 'what is' (the three period lesson) and that is how you introduce everything in Montessori, it is the basis of the Montessori classroom." (Interview #1, p9, 2/8/94)

Greeting: This took place at the entrance of the classroom where the children made the transition into a new and different environment, one which was according to Montessori, symbolic of the home yet which was bound by particular rules and procedures. The children separated from their parents at this point and Jean ushered the children directly into the classroom. Parents were not encouraged to linger for any great length of time and so it was a relatively formal separation for adult and child.

Activity time: This period of the day represented the true Montessori tradition and made up a significant proportion of the day's proceedings. Children were encouraged to become involved in as many activities as possible. The activities were carefully specified by the Montessori handbook and were chosen by the teacher to meet specific developmental needs of the age group. Highly ritualised procedures for selection, use and storage were clearly articulated and followed by the children. At Swanleigh, the rituals were not so much teacher selected, rather they were imposed through the philosophy and method laid down by Maria Montessori and carefully put in place and practiced by Jean as she attempted to fulfil her objectives and intentions. Jean, however, did work outside the Montessori rituals to the extent that she brought her own personal beliefs and knowledge about early childhood, derived from previous experience and founded in her kindergarten training, to blend with the Montessori traditions.

The three period lesson: This ritual was used to instil a particular method for completing a task. The format rigorously followed by Jean was responsible for ritualising the way the children went about their tasks and was a distinctive feature of Swanleigh.

Mat time: This ritual was used by Jean as a meeting time, to bring the children together to create a sense of community through the sharing of news. It was also a ritual of discipline and order, one of the few occasions where children socialised as a whole group. In the overall scheme of the day, this activity was a visible pedagogical form for Jean in contrast to the more nebulous aspects of her role as facilitator which was advocated by the Montessori approach. Here, Jean used her kindergarten background to implement a procedure which helped to legitimise her professional role and to develop a feeling of togetherness which she saw as desirable and which was a part of her personal teaching style.

Outdoor play: This was a period of free play which Jean and her assistant supervised closely. Due to the location of the classroom in relation to the play area, the session was undirected and used primarily for the children to let off steam and to have a break from the more intensive indoor activities. The procedures for moving children to and from the play area were traditional and systematic. Children lined up at the door and were marshalled in unison. Once at the playground, they were released to freely play on the apparatus or in the sand pit. This activity represented a break from the more rigorous program for both the teacher and the children.

Lunch time: The tradition of lunch time stemmed from the original program initiated by Maria Montessori and was a key time of the day in the Montessori classroom. The preparation and eating of lunch was a highly ritualised ceremony which had considerable significance for the participants. In the *Children's House* lunch was a nutritious meal provided for children who came from extremely deprived backgrounds and the meal provided the necessary sustenance as well as the opportunity for children to share as a family and to engage in social training. At Swanleigh, lunch time carried the same meaning. Children set their own places, observed the correct protocol and participated in

a shared activity, interspersed with a range of conversation which made it a very sociable event. For children who attended half day sessions, it marked the end of the school day.

Jean operated within the strict code of Montessori philosophy. However, there were visible variations which were the result of constraints due to the physical location and structure of the classroom and from Jean's personal interpretation of what early childhood should be about. The environment and materials which dictated the activities to be carried out set the formula for repetitive, patterned and ordered ways of operating for both the children and for Jean. Jean's teaching approach was a clear representation and transmission of an explicit philosophy which was understood by her and the parents. Jean believed that children progress through particular stages, that certain experiences were associated with particular stages of development and that, 'life skills' formed the central focus and therefore the basis for coping in real life. Even though Montessori philosophy formed a strong foundation for Jean she had her own beliefs about early childhood education. These she blended with her traditional program in order to ensure that her school served the needs of the children within the context of today's society. Jean was aware of the need to keep abreast of the modern world and to ensure her program reflected the here and now, along with what may have been important for Montessori at the turn of the century. In effect, the ritual of Montessori was set in place for Jean. When she accepted the philosophy and practices of the Montessori method she inadvertently accepted the rituals and traditions of that approach.

Diane

After 10 years of teaching experience, Diane had established a particular way of doing things. She viewed pre-primary as a transition phase, a rite of passage, where her intention was to prepare children for formal schooling. The daily schedule was followed

religiously. However, Diane did allow herself the freedom to improvise and to change her proposed program as she saw fit. Control and order were central to Diane's way of operating. Her daily program was relatively content free, save for the expectations imposed by outside sources, namely, the principal and the year one teacher. Whole group sessions dominated the daily schedule, and this placed her in control and able to dictate classroom procedures. She explained,

> I suppose rituals keep me organised. The children know my rituals now... they know what's coming up next, and it just keeps my sanity, and everything runs smoothly. The children know my expectations and these come through quite strongly in my rituals... and that's when I set a lot of my rules. Without having the actual rules and routines, I don't think I could work. (Interview #5, p1, 7/9/94)

Arrival and greetings: This ritual followed the same format over the two years of observation. It provided a contact point between parents and teacher and was specifically designed as a settling down time for children as they made the transition from home or day care to school. In effect, Diane used arrival time to established order and control. She restricted and contained the children's activity and confined it to a particular space.

Mat time: Mat sessions dominated Diane's day and were regarded by her as sacred. She established a sequence of actions and set of rules for how mat time should operate, and assumed the role of both director and performer. From these actions, the children learned how to behave, conform to the group, what it was like to be at school, and at the same time they learned how to please the teacher. Diane orchestrated the events, commanded the performance and displayed her talent and skill.

Activity time: Here Diane planned a series of activities which enabled the children to participate in various manipulative experiences which promoted fine motor skills and resulted in producing an item which the children could take home to show parents. She routinely dismissed children to small groups on a rotational basis, as she supervised the completion of tasks. Activity time was mandatory and represented an invariant form of ritual for Diane in that it was consistent and unchanged, and at the same time affirmed productivity for Diane and her superiors.

Fruit time: Occurring at a set time every day, this activity was carefully orchestrated by Diane. Within the invariant framework of her daily schedule Diane introduced a variety of formats for fruit time over the span of the year. In most cases it was an organised, adult dominated event with specific rules and procedures which were highly systematic and rehearsed by all participants. Diane progressed from whole group to small group encounters, depending on the time of the year. The small group sessions varied further as the end of the year approached and the children were older and closer to formal schooling. She explained her various forms of fruit time as; "It might be the same ritual but the actual content is different and that's to make things more interesting, but it's not so different that the children are lost and they don't know what is going on" (Interview #5 p4 7/9/94). As the year progressed Diane introduced changes to the format which aimed to prepare the children for the routines of year one and formal schooling.

Music: This was highly valued by Diane. She designed and led the program which was performance based. The children from Connor often performed for parents and visitors on special occasions such as Parent's Night, and Father's Night. But the grand performance of all was the item prepared for the school assembly. Here, Diane, her assistant and several parents prepared costumes and props and the children rehearsed the production. It was a public display, a demonstration of accountability and credited Diane with skill and proficiency.

Transitions: Diane established a repertoire of pedagogical techniques for moving children in an orderly fashion around the centre. Always controlled and systematic she invariably turned these play-way techniques into a learning situation. These activities provided variation to an otherwise simple routine whilst preserving the underlying purpose of order and conformity.

Diane had been considerably influenced by her teacher training, her early experience and in particular her current location. She perceived certain external expectations placed upon her, and therefore she shaped her program to meet outside demands and strove to demonstrate that she could fulfil these obligations. The content of Diane's program was particularly related to teaching manners, group skills, and conforming to rules. Her personal belief was that "children should enjoy school and make a smooth transition from home to school" (Interview #2 p2 10/8/94). Socialisation was also a key issue for Diane and she saw this as showing respect for peers and teachers and functioning effectively as a group. Diane had defined these traits as right and proper and went about reinforcing them through her rituals.

Forms of Ritual

Each of the three teachers held strong personal views of their role in teaching young children and of what early childhood was about. Helen, Jean and Diane had developed and articulated individual perspectives on goals, intentions and aspirations for their classrooms which shaped the forms of ritual and which were maintained through their rituals.

As the performances were played out by the three teachers, different patterns emerged. Ritual forms were categorised as 'invariant and variant', 'macro and micro', 'high and low', and 'institutional and personal' (see Table 1). In pairing the various forms in this way, a comparison of the broad and specific elements of ritual can be discussed. Later, I regroup the forms of ritual as a way of discussing their function.

Variant and invariant rituals

Rappaport's (1989, p467) description of ritual, "as the performance of more or less invariant sequences of action" suggests that there are two messages being transmitted by ritual. Firstly through the invariant order of the ritual, the surface messages transmitted are those of patterned and perfected order. The repetitive, deliberate and stylised behaviour, provides an uncontested pattern of doing and communicates what is already known and is accepted and unquestioned. Secondly through variations in the signs and symbols of the ritual deeper meanings are carried through the variant patterns of action. For the three teachers classroom practice was predominantly characterised by invariant ritual action. When variation did occur it provided scope for restructuring pedagogy to meet specific intentions, to stimulate interest, and facilitate understanding. The variations provided a context which was more conducive to inquiry and discovery for the participants.

For example, in Diane's classroom the invariant ritualised action which dominated a large proportion of the day was that of the children being together on the mat. Here the surface messages being conveyed were those of knowing how to act and behave. The ritual taught children how to come together on the floor, sit in a circle, how to wait for a turn, procedures for speaking and listening, sharing, using manners, clearing away and knowing the rules for moving and behaving. Diane's rituals of mat time generated for the

participants a knowledge of how to act in this particular situation, that is, social order, conformity and compliance. When the children were assembled on the mat, for whatever activity, they responded in a certain and predictable manner. There was a sense of group knowledge. The ritual of mat time was known by all and performed accordingly. Diane derived great success from her prescriptive methods in that the children were inducted into the ritual and they performed it well.

When Diane varied the predictable pattern of snack time so that groups of children could share the opportunity to have a picnic in the cubby house she transformed the invariant ritual into a problem solving activity. The children were instructed to make up a basket of fruit, take it to the cubby house and were left to their own devises as to how they would organise and conduct themselves. The underlying messages of fruit time remained as unspoken rules, yet for the participants in the ritual there was scope for personal interpretation, through intellectualising and discovery. In this way, Diane worked within and around the ritual to meet certain intentions and the ritual assumed a pedagogical function.

Helen made very few variations to the overall macro structure of her practice over the time she taught at Radford. The yearly pattern of her program content had remained relatively static. The content of her program had become very predictable for her and her assistant. Marcia (the assistant) was able to prepare materials and resources with little consultation. She knew what Helen would need at a particular stage of the year, on a particular day of the program. However, Helen did vary the way she operated on a micro level. She altered day to day events such as 'roll call' and 'star person', whilst maintaining the overall structure and purpose, and she was willing to introduce new innovative practices within the overall framework of her program. When embracing innovations, she interpreted and incorporated them into existing structures without significant upheaval to her existing formula.

For both Diane and Helen invariant rituals provided a structure or tool for the automatic transmission of a particular kind of knowledge. However, when variations did occur in the performance of rituals, the underlying messages remained the same, but there was a deeper more rational and personalised pedagogical purpose for both these teachers.

For Jean, the rituals which were such an important part of the Montessori philosophy assumed invariant forms. She did not deviate from the way the children were instructed to 'do a job'. Her commitment to children developing mastery of a technique and completion of tasks, remained constant and systematic. There was no variation in the performance of the participants. These forms of ritual enabled Jean to go about her daily teaching in a well defined and certain fashion. The ritual structure operated to manipulate the way the children participated while Jean was free to be an observer, and to respond on an individual basis where and when necessary. When Jean varied her Montessori practice by introducing a small group free discovery activity, she quickly worked to formalise the activity and to mould it to suit the ritualised format of Montessori's individualised 'job'.

Macro and micro ritual

What was particularly evident in the three settings was the ritualised structure of the program maintained on a weekly, annual and seasonal basis. In each setting there was a clear pattern to how the program was designed and structured over the extended period of time. I have taken McLaren's (1986) category, and called this the macro system. In contrast was the daily individual lessons or sets of actions used to maintain continuity, predictability and coherence to the program and yet provided opportunity for flexibility and for personal interpretation and adaptation by the teacher. This comprised the micro

rituals, and together the micro rituals composed the macro system. Thus the micro system represented the regular, personal and prescribed format of the daily timetable.

The macro system of rituals had elements of similarity across the three settings yet there were also differences in each of the classroom settings. All three teachers recognised and celebrated significant cultural and national events and these represented notable landmarks in the overall curriculum. In Radford and Connor, themes were used to integrate content areas and in some instances these were introduced at relatively the same time of the year. For example, both Helen and Diane began the year with the theme of 'Myself' and ended it with the theme of 'Christmas'.

Helen adhered to a very strict regime over the year. She had developed a sequential structure for her yearly program which had become a long standing tradition for her and which she implemented religiously almost to the exact week. She had identified a set of topics which she introduced as themes and repeated these on a yearly basis with very little variation in the twenty years she had been teaching at Radford. When I returned to her classroom one year later, she was talking about the same topic, using the same resources and implementing the same activities. It was as though she was following a script. Along with her performance she had developed a set of 'stories' which had become central to the culture of Radford Pre-Primary. These stories had persevered over time as Vanessa, the year ten student witnessed on her return to Radford ten years later. Helen had a body of knowledge for each of the themes that she deemed important for the children to know and so she developed stories to assist children in the retention and recall of these facts. When she told the story of Italy, she included the story of "long legged Italy kicked poor Sicily " and when she told the story of Japan, she included, "Tokyo rhymes with Pinnochio." Her teaching was interspersed with these kinds of myths, which served two pedagogical purposes, firstly to engage the children in the lesson, and secondly to act as a strategy for imparting and retrieving knowledge and

facts. Background knowledge was an important area for Helen, and she endeavoured to, "expose children to a wide range of general knowledge, so they can make connections in other situations" (Interview #7 p3 24/10/94). Helen's reputation in the field for exemplary practice had been built on her traditional use of themes and the overall structure of her program.

On a micro level, Helen worked to a carefully formulated plan. She spoke of the "need to accomplish her daily teaching tasks in order to account for each child's progress" (Interview #2, p1, 7/8/94). Helen had developed a set formula for each day and a plan for the week which she conscientiously complied with and which in her mind enabled the children to know the routine and anticipate the coming events. This she interpreted as providing the children with a sense of security and stability and at the same time it allowed her to be organised and well prepared.

Diane also had her prescriptive schedule. Although more flexible in her approach, she had identified several significant themes which formed the framework for her schedule. These topics were identified as worthwhile and were addressed at particular times of the year. Diane always started the year with the theme of Myself, and Dinosaurs was a theme which was introduced in term 2, when she generally accepted a student teacher in her room for a period of ten weeks. For Diane, theme work was a way of maintaining the children's interest and of, "adapting the syllabus into an interesting way of doing things" (Interview #1, p6, 10/8/94).

Diane's daily timetable provided a structure for her and the children through which she could be accountable. Although this overall schedule remained relatively constant, she was more impulsive in her daily decision making and not as strongly committed to adhering to established plans within the broad timetable structure, as was Helen. For example, Diane was more inclined to be spontaneous, and change content and plans at the

last minute for personal reasons although she remained within the boundaries of her timetable.

At Swanleigh, Jean's program did not alter significantly on a macro or micro level. There was a strong sense of consistency on a year to year basis and on a day to day level. It was difficult for me to identify where the year's work began and ended for the children, such was the cyclic nature of the daily events. In fact there was no beginning or end for the children, rather, they experienced a smooth transition through the program as three to five year olds, the end coming if the children changed into the main stream education system. The stylised behaviour which the children engaged in on a day to day basis was highly predictable, stable and repetitive.

High and low rituals

Henry (1992) codifies rituals as 'high' or 'low' depending on their status. She explains that in the anthropology literature, 'high rituals' relate to ceremonies such as initiation rites, funeral rites, feast days and marriage rites (p. 5). In pre-primary settings, 'high rituals' include the celebrations of social and cultural events such as Father's Day, Christmas, and Birthdays, as well as ceremonious events such as attending the school assembly. These rituals were identified by teachers as those less likely to be omitted from their program and are symbolic, well planned, rehearsed and hold particular significance for the teachers and the participants.

Each of the three teachers embodied 'high rituals' as part of their repertoire of teaching. Even Jean celebrated cultural events such as Christmas, Mother's Day and Birthdays. She saw these events as part of the children's life experiences and therefore as important enough to be part of their school experiences. She admitted:

> I am limited in the things that I offer in my classroom, probably that is a confidence thing with me. Sometimes I worry too much whether it fits strictly into what I feel should be in a Montessori classroom. I have this kind of dilemma all the time. There are lots of things in my classroom that Maria Montessori would never have written about and I think they deserve to be in here. (Interview #6, p5, 25/10/94)

For Jean the embracing of 'high rituals' was a way of keeping in touch with events which were important real life, culturally specific situations for the children. Although not a part of the Montessori tradition, in Jean's mind they formed part of the 'life skills' advocated by Montessori. Jean sought to keep up with the modern times, address real life situations and yet maintain her Montessori-kindergarten balance.

At Helen's and Diane's centre, high rituals were the public face of their pre-primary. Parents and relatives were invited to join in the celebrations, to witness the enactment of special events in a more reverent manner. The ceremonies, be it a concert, grandparents' afternoon tea, or a social gathering, were intended to raise community awareness of the purpose and meaning (the wonders and joy) of pre-primary. For Helen, public displays were ways of reaching out to families, maintaining her reputation and of demonstrating her accountability to parents. Whereas for Diane 'high rituals' such as Father's Night, Christmas, and Valentine's Day were elaborate productions for her and the children and an opportunity for her to parade her talents to parents and colleagues. These celebrations enabled her to put herself, as teacher, on show for the school administration and parents to judge her performance and competence.

Father's Night at Connor PP: A High Ritual. The daily activities in the preceding weeks became totally focussed on the coming event. Over a number of weeks children made a

simple gift and a card to present on Father's Day. The children painted pictures of their father and dictated stories about them to Diane and these were used to decorate the centre. Diane's music sessions were used to teach and rehearse a number of songs and items which would be performed at the Father's Night concert.

On the evening of the concert, fathers and surrogates arrived with their children at the centre at 6.00 o'clock in the evening. Diane and her assistant were there to welcome them and Diane made a point of meeting and talking to all in attendance. Diane had organised a light supper and the children had been instructed to assist their fathers in this regard. After the meal the children lead their fathers to a number of activities which had been set up around the centre. These were the typical activities which children participated in each day, such as painting, play dough, puzzles, construction, including the woodwork bench and computer games. Diane explains that this was an opportunity for fathers to see and experience first hand the types of activities which make up their children's program. This period of free activity allowed Diane to take on her role as teacher and she moved from group to group playing out the experiences of a typical day. The activities were followed by the main event, the concert. This was the grand performance for the evening and a chance for Diane and the children to display their talents with the children singing, dancing, acting and performing and with Diane orchestrating the proceedings. Diane led the children through a number of songs which were accompanied by percussion instruments. All children took a turn with the instruments and there were a range of props and costumes which completed the show. It was a performance of high quality. The children have learned their parts well and the fathers were delighted with the presentation. By 7.30 pm the evening had drawn to a close, Diane thanked the attendants and urged fathers to be part of the centre roster of parent helpers.

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Father's Night had become a yearly tradition at Connor Pre-Primary. It was an opportunity for Diane to demonstrate her teaching skills and to further forge relationships with families which was very important to her. She took these opportunities to sell herself and her program.

Low rituals related to the everyday events, such as, sitting on the mat, checking the weather and calendar, roll call, gathering and dismissing children and transitions. Although low rituals are less sophisticated than high ritual, McLaren (1986) defines all ritual as "organised behaviour arising out of the ordinary business of life" and in so doing, elevates routine or habitual action to a "genuine form of ritualised behaviour" (p. 40). Low rituals are important in that they are the events by which the culture of pre-primary is identified. They are what give the various programs their individuality, and consequently they overlap with personal forms of ritual.

All three teachers had a set of procedures which were routinised and ritualised. Through the acting out of a set of regulated and controlled behaviours the teachers were able to maintain control, more particularly to convey messages of certainty, order and conformity. For Jean, the circle marked on the centre of the mat symbolised certain activity and behaviour. It defined an area for children to assemble and was symbolic of community and family whilst providing a boundary for certain activities. Often children would be instructed to walk or skip along the marked circle, to play a musical instrument as they circled around, or to sit on the circle or within the circle. It clearly marked out a code of behaviour required by Jean at certain times of the day. Likewise, the mat area in Radford and Connor had assumed symbolic significance. The mat was a place for coming together, of developing a sense of community. The assortment of activities conducted on the mat have over time become the trade mark for pre-primary education. It is a pre-primary tradition to come together for a greeting, to check the weather and calendar, to take a roll call, to have a news telling session, to discuss a topic of interest, to

share a story and to play games. Helen, Jean and Diane adopted part or all of these traditions as part of their day.

An important low ritual for Helen, was the preparation of her environment. Indeed Helen took great pride in the appearance of her classroom. She made regular reference to the importance of the aesthetic appeal of the environment and the need to be organised and well prepared.

Preparation at Radford: A Low Ritual. The centre was a rich, visually stimulating environment, almost perfect in its neatness and organisation. Everything was carefully arranged, much as one would arrange a dinner table for guests; scissors, paper, pens and pencils all neatly set out in consistent order. Marcia (the assistant) had responsibility for maintaining the environment, although she acted on Helen's wishes. Helen and Marcia had been working together for twelve years and were best friends in and out of school. These two women had developed a tremendous sense of synchronisation, in that they could accurately anticipate each other's needs and moves. Marcia could anticipate what Helen would need at certain times of the day. During mat time, the props and aids materialised within arms reach of Helen as she conducted her session. This was a reflection of the degree of planning and of the predictability of the daily events. Helen's planning and preparation was almost an obsession. She was firmly entrenched in a timetable which saw her at the school a week before school officially began, and commencing each day at 7.00 am. When Helen arrived in the morning, her first task was to load a cassette of classical music into the cassette player, and to the soft strains of Mozart or Strauss, she went about her business of preparing for the day.

> I have to set up the tables, put out the activities and set up the outdoor area. I like to have a lot of things in the outdoor area, and it's my choosing. I like to set up the obstacle course because I know what I

have programmed for and I put out as much as I can in half an hour and when Marcia comes she will see what I haven't had time to do and she will do the rest. Then I come inside and change the indoor activities as necessary so the children can look and see what is different. Sometimes I need to go to the primary school to check for messages and use the photocopier. (Interview #9, p3, 1/10/95)

The end of the school day was a wind down time for Helen and Marcia. They sat over a cup of coffee and reviewed the day. The program was discussed and future plans ware made. At Radford, Wednesday was a non contact day, which meant that the children did not attend and the day was designated a preparation day for Helen and Marcia. On this day, the daily running of the program was attended to, children's progress was assessed and reviewed thoroughly and records of the children's learning were examined and updated. Helen gave particular attention to the social development of children, including friendship formation, confidence, group skills, cooperation and self reliance and made note of this on children's individual record folders. Staff meetings at the primary school were also held on this day.

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Helen's commitment to the children and her program was reflected in her preparation and planning. Preparation featured prominently in Helen's conversations about her teaching. She went to great lengths to ensure the children had an environment which mirrored what she considered to be a consistently high standard of presentation. The way in which this setting was structured became part of the predicability of coming to school which the children came to recognise and learn.

Institutional and personal rituals

Rituals took on institutional and personal forms. Institutional forms of ritual denote tradition and custom and are more likely to be handed down from one generation to another. For example, at Swanleigh the 'three period' lesson and the fundamental lesson were used to maintain the Montessori tradition. The ritual of mastery which was a well documented feature of the Montessori approach, formed the foundation of Jean's program. This aspect of Jean's approach accounted for her devotion to the Montessori system and at the same time sanctioned her approach to parents. Her personal rituals stemmed from influences outside the Montessori tradition. Jean justified her mat sessions as the influence from her kindergarten training, whilst her use of the bell to assemble children who wished to use the bathroom, evolved due to the constraints of the location and physical setting. When Jean introduced the small group activity of finger painting she quickly explained that it would not be the norm, and that she would consider ways of turning it into a Montessori-type activity:

> A lesson that was less teacher directed, by putting it out as a tray job where children would help themselves and be involved in an individual experience and I don't need to be involved for the whole morning like I was yesterday. (Interview #3, p4, 16/8/94)

In effect, Jean was resolved to ritualising the new experience in such a way so as to advance the Montessori tradition.

Unlike the Montessori approach, the West Australian system of early childhood education does not have a definitive theoretical structure. Rather, teachers construct a personal philosophical base, drawing on broad theoretical principles in relation to theories of development and learning, both traditional and current. These principles, together with

personal orientations underpin and drive early childhood practice. For Helen and Diane institutional rituals stemmed from long standing traditions of early childhood education, which in Western Australia have their roots in the kindergarten movement. At the turn of the century, Froebel and Pestalozzi provided a natural-romantic approach to early education, with significant influence coming from Piaget's child development theories of the 1950's and 60's. The merging of these paradigms together with the more recent socio-cultural perspective of Vygotsky have resulted in a blurring of boundaries, with emphasis on the child as a member of a social system (Bowman, 1993). Rituals such as snack time and mat time stem from the early Froebelian kindergarten pedagogy and for Helen and Diane, fall into the category of institutional ritual. Added to these, are the conventions perpetuated by the local education system, such as observing cultural events, promoting sports day and convening school assemblies, all of which maintain a particular public image of the school.

Personal forms of ritual, were created and set in place as a response to personal goals and to achieve certain outcomes. Examples of personal forms of ritual were the transitions which Diane instigated over time to maintain control and order. That is, the method used to transfer from one activity to another, and to orchestrate physical movement of children throughout the centre. For Helen, a ritual which enables her to formalise a deliberate, and personal action and which consequently became part of her pedagogy was the reading of the notice board.

The Notice Board: A Personal Ritual. Every day Helen positioned the notice board at the entrance to the centre. It was an easel to which she attached a large piece of paper with a neatly hand printed message. As the pairs of children and parents arrived they all stopped without exception at the notice board to read the message. Helen explained that this procedure evolved throughout the year. "At the beginning of the year the parents do all the reading, but slowly as the children become more skilled, they take over the reading of

the message" she clarified. The parents and children were well rehearsed in the purpose and benefits of having the notice board and of the importance of decoding the message together and so very rarely was the notice board ignored as the entrance was made. The messages covered a range of topics from trivial bits of information such as, "Children did you know that on August 1st all horses have a birthday?" to comments on the theme for the week, "If we want to go to England we need to go by aeroplane" to incidental notes and reminders such as "Next week we will be having our Father's Night concert." With the message read, the children passed through the doorway, into the realm of the classroom.

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Helen had several instructional objectives for this particular custom which she had put into place. She used the printed message as an advanced organiser to the day's topic of discussion. In this way it became a cue for both children and parents, whilst simultaneously the activity was used as a pre-reading strategy and the exploration of language in meaningful contexts. For the children and parents it represented a collaborative learning activity, and for Helen it served an important pedagogical purpose. The process had become a carefully planned experience which had educational value for the children, the parents and for herself.

Functions of Ritual

If the forms of ritual are regrouped firstly as invariant, macro, high and institutional and secondly as variant, micro, low and personal, a clearer understanding of their function can be gleaned. The first group represents the stable, formalised and traditional events which generally have become institutionalised, that is, sanctioned by outside influences such as the administration, or the education system, or parents and

community expectations. Thus, these forms of ritual function as ceremonial events and become a public demonstration of the beliefs and practices of that classroom. The second group represents the day to day events which are varied, multi-layered, symbolic and personal. These forms of ritual, function to personalise the teaching process. Helen, Jean and Diane each had an individualised system and a set of procedures by which their work could be identified.

Ritual as a means of communication

According to Leach (1968) all behaviour is a form of communicating information and therefore actions can serve to say things. Ritual has been identified as a form of communication through signs, symbols and gestures (Rappaport, 1989; Harris, 1992; Geertz, 1973). Ritual in the three classroom settings established a strong sense of fellowship between the teacher and the children, through which modes of participation and communication were set in place. Firstly, social order was established and maintained through the construction of a framework of meanings and communicated by the action of ritual. Secondly, ritual enabled an expression of personal knowledge, experience and personal philosophy to be transmitted through classroom situations.

Each teacher held a particular world view, an individual understanding and respect for social order and a personal perspective on standards, norms and values. In addition, each teacher had distinctive goals, objectives and purposes for education and schooling which were reflected in the way they orchestrated their classrooms. At Radford, Helen's personal objective in life was to, "be a successful teacher." She perpetuated her commitment to pastoral care through a "quiet and concerned interest in the welfare and progress of all students" (Interview #2, p1, 7/8/94). Her actions invited a particular kind of bonding, where children developed a shared sense of community. Her "sharing and

caring environment" was the foundation of her practice and Helen was able to induct children into this community by ritualising a number of scripted behaviours. Helen used the mat to construct a context which was meaningful for the children and which engaged the children in her teaching. It symbolised a place to meet, to assemble together to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences. It was a place for talking, for exploring, asking questions and clarifying and this was encouraged by Helen in a controlled, yet liberated manner. On one hand, Helen's only rule was that only one person should speak at one time, thus restricting participation, whilst emphasising the need for courtesy and respect for one another. On the other hand she encouraged children to freely interact as she expertly dealt with questions and interruptions. Helen explained:

> In the early years of my teaching I would have been thrown by the children's questioning or interruptions. I think the children need to have a say, it may not always be relevant but it's important to them. And if I'm going to help with language skills they must talk. They can easily learn to put their hands up in year one, I don't need to teach them that. (Interview #6, p6, 5/9/94)

Helen held several goals for her mat sessions which had been put into place over a number of years. Apart from the overt curriculum objectives, she used the time, "to tune in to how the child is for the day" and to ascertain, "social, emotional and physical needs, which will set the tone for the day for that child" (Interview #3, p6, 15/8/94). Through the greeting and roll call, Helen conveyed messages of certainty, acceptance and belonging and through her discussions she ensured children developed the confidence to contribute, so that they felt valued members of the social group where opinions were accepted and recognised as worthwhile. For Helen, the children's happiness was paramount. She wanted pre-primary to be a home away from home for the children, where they felt safe, comfortable, happy and free from anxieties and stress.

Consequently, she used her morning assembly on the mat to establish and communicate this culture and to perpetuate this climate.

At Swanleigh Montessori school, Jean communicated messages about being self sufficient and independent. The children at Swanleigh went about their daily business in much the same way each day. They knew what to do, and how to do it. If they came across a new piece of equipment, they waited for Jean to show them how to complete the job. Jean felt very strongly about the prepared environment, as essential in teaching and learning and she designed it to ensure the children achieved success and developed a sense of self confidence and mastery through the repetition of simple tasks. Jean, in fact, had developed a ritualised expectation of the use of the materials and equipment and the children were inculcated with qualities of self discipline and independence. This adherence to routine and correctness conveyed messages of order and precision.

At Connor, Diane's rituals functioned to transmit messages of conformity, structure and predictability. She wanted the children to learn about coming to school. Diane had marked out pre-primary as a transition to the more important formal beginning of schooling. In this way, pre-primary served a particular purpose for her and consequently became a rite of passage for the children, as they prepared for formal schooling. Her patterns of action communicated rules for behaving and operating. The children learned a code which governed their existence from the first day of their pre-primary year. This was different to the home state and was a preparation for the school state. On the first day of the year, Diane introduced the rules of the centre which she then reinforced on a daily basis for the remainder of the year. Children were conditioned to conform to a set of laws about sitting, speaking, listening and responding. Diane spent a significant proportion of the day in a whole group situation where she orchestrated the events and where she could reinforce these messages. Thus, she was able to hold the reins, dictate the pace and manage the proceedings.

Ritual as a means of socialisation

Socialising children was a key objective of each of the teachers and, therefore, all three teachers had rituals which functioned to meet this objective. However, Helen, Jean and Diane had varying personal interpretations on socialising children and what it meant to be an accepted member of the classroom group and this was played out in their day to day teaching. Helen worked to extend the socialisation process which in her mind began in the home. She wanted her centre to mirror the values perpetuated in the home, that of a happy, safe, secure and caring environment. Her ritualisation of the roll call and the 'star person' were ways of maintaining and lifting the status of each individual in the classroom. Helen worked extremely hard to ensure that each child became an accepted member of the group and that her personal goal of a, "caring and sharing" community was preserved. In addition Helen included and welcomed parental input in her centre and over the years of teaching in the same school and neighbourhood, she had constructed a personal perception of what home was like for most of her children. Nevertheless, she had her own ideals and resembled a mother hen with her chicks as she gathered, settled and protected each individual in her group.

On the child's arrival at school for the first day, Jean would begin an induction into the behaviours, thoughts and sentiments of the specific culture of her Montessori classroom. She promoted the development of individual qualities, such as independence, self control, intrinsic motivation, personal achievement and mastery, rather than group skills. The children at Swanleigh, were taught what was right and wrong and what was good and bad. As they learned the "life skills" inherent in the experiences and activities they quickly learned to become able members of their classroom and functioned

successfully within the boundaries of the group. The transfer of these skills outside of school was also a major objective of the method at Swanleigh.

For Diane, learning how to function effectively as a member of a group was very important. Through her classroom structure and her personal method of teaching she set limits and boundaries and expected children to conform to these. In reality, she manipulated and moulded the children until they conformed to her idea of what it was to be a "good" class member. For the children entering Connor, pre-primary meant moving into a new realm with new conditions and expectations, responding to a new set of regulations and ways of acting which were different from the home state. Diane put in place a set of actions through her whole group sessions which placed her in charge.

Ritual as a means of enculturation

Through behaviours labelled ritual, participants were immersed in the process of learning the complex meaning that defined the social reality of the group and the rules which enable all to function within it. Thus ritual activity was a means of sustaining, transmitting and internalising societal and cultural ideologies. Rituals were a fact of classroom life, they evolved out of human activity and therefore supported the social structure of the cultural setting of the classroom. Rituals became the symbolic codes for interpreting and negotiating events in the everyday life of schooling (McLaren, 1986, p. 36). In this way, the persistent, patterned interactions of classroom life acted as a vehicle for the cultural conditioning of children. The children became familiar with and eventually took on the way of life of the classroom.

In Helen's classroom the children were exposed to a set of values, attitudes and protocols which were important to Helen and which she had developed over the length of

her career. Although there was an element of compliance, that is, she set out certain expectations about the proper and improper way to act and behave, there were few if any, overt rules and regulations. Helen was a nurturing and caring teacher. She constantly touched and cuddled children and she always spoke in low, soothing tones. She never reprimanded a child within ear shot of the group, but instead she would wrap her arm around the child and move them some distance away to quietly and individually discuss the problem. I never saw Helen lose her temper, or become angry. In effect Helen assumed the full role of surrogate mother, of *in loco parentis,* together with responsibilities for duty of care which resulted in a smooth transition from home to school for the children. Her classroom represented a safe haven for the children. Helen's objective was for children to be happy at school and for children's schooling to be a positive experience. Thus, her classroom events and activities eased the induction to school. A strong notion of community was perpetuated through activities such as snack time, story time and mat time. The reading of the notice board and entry into the classroom, facilitated the separation from the parent, whilst the greeting, roll call and nomination of the star person affirmed the relationships between teacher and children and child to child which at Radford was fundamental to the on-going way of life in the classroom.

At Swanleigh, Jean perpetuated the culture of the *Children's House* as was instigated by Montessori. The children were initiated into a particular type of schooling through a series of transforming events and activities. Parents surrendered their children into the hands of a teacher they had specifically chosen to care for their children, unlike the state system, where choice is not always possible. Normally the parents of Swanleigh had made a conscious decision to send their children to the school. They had the luxury of visiting, inspecting, and finally selecting the school based on Jean's explanations of what Swanleigh stood for and what it was about. A significant number of children began at Swanleigh at the age of three years, and continued until the end of the year in which

they turned five. Over this extended period of time the children were reinforced for self control, responsibility, independence and autonomy. Children learned to operate on an individual level which in fact became a form of isolation, as they learned to separate from their peers when completing tasks. The apparatus which dominated the curriculum called for limited creative thinking, yet there was a sequenced plan to the completion of many of the activities in the kitchen, which called for deliberate thinking and execution on the part of the children, and which could be classified as meta-cognitive skills.

Diane transmitted the message of pre-primary as a special place. There were clear sets of rules in place from the first day of school, and only certain types of behaviours were tolerated. A great deal of Diane's daily activity was directed at conditioning children to respond correctly to her expectations. She had a prototype of the ideal student and proceeded to mould the children to this model. She reinforced compliance, passivity and behaviours which reflected good manners and obedience. She encouraged children to take responsibility for their own behaviour and to this end she expected children to conform to rules, to be involved in keeping the classroom neat and orderly, and to have respect for materials and equipment by using them correctly. Through the classroom sessions and events planned by Diane the children were taught to interact with each other and with the teacher in a certain, scripted way. A major theme of conformity pervaded the classroom; conforming to a predetermined set of principles which had become the basis of Diane's role in pre-primary. When the children came to Connor, they quickly learned what school was about, in particular, what Connor Pre-primary was about, how one should act and behave at school, and of ultimate importance, what would please the teacher.

Ritual as a means of instruction

The ritualisation of pedagogy enables teachers to "install" a particular philosophy and technology of teaching, whereby, affirming or justifying ways of doing things as educationally and morally sound for the teacher. Through rituals teachers express themselves, they tell us what it is like to be in that classroom and what is valued and worthy. Leach's (1968) common sense approach is that ritual acts are to be interpreted in the context of belief; they mean what the actors say they mean. Therefore rituals are a reflection of teachers' knowledge, their judgements, decisions and intentions.

In the case of Helen, Jean and Diane, ritual acted as a structure whereby they were able to put in place a set of instructional and organisational goals and strategies which had different purposes for each of these teachers. So, for the three teachers ritual became an enactment of their personal curriculum and revealed the personal dimension of each of the classrooms. Decisions about what was important for children to know and how it was to be taught reflected individual preferences and strengths. The rituals depicted a way of doing, a personal teaching style which was different for each of the teachers.

For Helen and Diane the state education system was an influence in decisions about organisational goals. Although enjoying a degree of autonomy, ultimately they were responsible to the school principal and state education department regulations. In Diane's case this was a strong influence, as she balanced the outside pressures and expectations of the administration and parents, with her own principles and convictions about what was best for the children. For Helen, her years of experience and the professional recognition she received enabled her to continue confidently and reinforced her practice so that at the macro level her system of operating remained constant and unchanging.

In Helen's case, theme work carried considerable significance. This was confirmed by the way it remained virtually unchanged as a crucial part of her curriculum for so many years and by the fact that it held a major place in the timetable and in the delivery of the planned program. Helen was most reluctant to alter or omit theme work from her plan. Through the theme work, Helen assumed the role of teacher as transmitter of knowledge. She believed that children should build a store of general knowledge and so she used her themes to codify a store of facts, concepts and understandings which she deemed important and which she imparted in a planned, ritualistic fashion. Helen had developed a highly repetitive and structured method of delivering this content. She would provide a running account of the key facts, telling a story about a particular country or about a community helper. During the theme work, she would stand in front of the group, and bending forward so as to narrow the gap between herself and the children, she would begin her description. Helen's choice of topics formed part of the macro-ritual at Radford Pre-Primary. From year to year little, if any, changes were made to the topics which had become curriculum priorities for Helen. Interspersed with the macro-rituals which were sacred to Helen, she introduced a number of initiatives which kept her abreast of the reforms in the field and gave her program the semblance of currency.

At Swanleigh, Jean taught in a way which defined her role as provider and facilitator. She was careful to maintain this status, and not to become an intruder in the children's learning. In Montessori teaching, there is fine line between assisting the child and interfering with a child's "natural yearning for physical and mental activity" (Montessori, 1967, p. 6). Jean was aware of this stance and consciously aimed to foster children's independence by ensuring that they became confident in developing their own actions and strategies, for learning to be self sufficient. With this in mind she manipulated the environment to encourage and facilitate repetition and mastery of tasks. In Montessori terms, the materials did the teaching while Jean acted as a catalyst in the child's learning.

Diane had developed a repertoire of pedagogical techniques which demonstrated her ability to manage children effectively and which put in place a meaningful program. In her method of delivery, Diane was a skilled performer. She had modelled herself on those she identifies as experts in the field and over the years had developed a level of expertise which had been accepted by colleagues and parents as highly satisfactory. At this stage of her career she was comfortable with her teaching. Her method of communication was a strength and she uses this to full advantage in both her teaching and contact with parents. Diane handled the whole group with skill and confidence, and thus whole group sessions dominated her program. At these times she assumed full control and was able to display the range of strategies and techniques which make her a good teacher. When she was in control she felt confident. It was interesting to note that for over sixty percent of the day Diane addressed the whole group. When children were involved in free activities, Diane monitored the noise level carefully and supervised constantly. It was her perception that noise and high levels of movement could be interpreted as a reflection of undisciplined behaviour and so she monitored this closely. Diane believed that pre-primary was a preparation for year one and that her role was to teach children how to behave in a fitting way in order to facilitate the transition for the year one teacher.

Content of Ritual

The content of ritual represented a particular teacher's construction of the world. The rituals also represented both overt and covert pools of knowledge gained by the teachers over an extended period of time in the profession. Curriculum choice was founded on decisions about what was to be taught and how it would be taught. These decisions were based on internalised frameworks of knowledge upon which teachers

drew in defining their understanding of early childhood education. Sources of professional knowledge varied. Further to her thirty years of teaching experiences, Helen was in constant contact with peers. She continually discussed aspects of the job, acknowledged and embraced new innovations as part of her teaching and researched literature for new ideas for her program. Jean was completing a Montessori training course. This kept her in touch with like-minded colleagues and abreast of the Montessori literature. Whilst her kindergarten training provided a source of ideas, she continually measured these against the Montessori tradition as a way of verifying her choice of content and her actions. Given the highly structured nature of the Montessori curriculum, the tasks, strategies, methods, and materials, it seemed that little choice was available for Jean in these areas. In her tenth year of teaching, Diane still remembered what it was like to be a student and how she performed on her teaching practice. Her early accomplishments at university and in her beginning years of teaching provided her with a yardstick for success and she strove to emulate these early achievements. However, several unfortunate experiences with new administration had left her insecure and unsure of her ability and thus she put in place a formula she perceived the administration would approve of and implemented the method as closely as possible.

In many ways, the rituals put in place by the three teachers became an articulation of their rationale for teaching and a representation of the decisions they made about pedagogy, content, theory and beliefs. All three teachers operated from a theoretical base. They held individual pools of knowledge which had become 'sacred', more specifically, elevated to a status of highly valued, revered or holy. This sacred knowledge was different for each teacher. For example, Jean's rationale was founded on a set of specific principles and beliefs and was explicit in that it was visible in her day to day orchestration of classroom life, and was clearly articulated by her in our discussions. For Helen and Diane, their rationale for teaching was more implicit. However, they drew on the set of principles which has come to underpin current early childhood practice in the literature.

What was evident was that these "truths" had been individually interpreted by these two teachers, so that personal purposes and intentions underpinned their practice.

Summary

Ritual was basic to life in the classroom and as such gave shape and form to that life. It determined what life in that particular classroom looked like and felt like. The over-arching framework, the macro-ritual system was invariant and predictable and relatively stable over the period of observation in all three settings. However, we cannot regard ritual as a fixed and unvarying sequence of actions. Attending to repeated performances of the same ritual in the same setting over an extended period of time did reveal differences in detail.

It is not surprising therefore, that whilst there were commonalities among the three teachers in this study there were also significant differences. It is also important to note that although some differences were immediately obvious, others were implicit and only after many observations and discussions did they begin to define themselves. In other words, with events which appeared common, over time, subtle differences emerged and became stronger. This was the case with mat time, which is recognised as a key event in pre-primary settings. All three teachers incorporated mat time in their program. On the surface it appeared to represent a meeting time and place, a gathering of the whole group with the teacher taking the lead role. It most often occurred at the beginning of the daily session, and included a number of discrete activities designed to orientate the children to school and the daily program. However, in all three settings, the teachers had specific individual agendas for mat time according to their personal goals. The ritual patterns of mat time served different means for reaching different ends. For Helen, it was a time when she did most of her teaching. She instructed the children and imparted a body of

facts and concepts. She set her standards, inculcated her beliefs and developed and transmitted conditions for operating and learning in Radford Pre-Primary. Jean used mat time as a transition. It was a break in the morning schedule which allowed children to come together and move to the next sequence of free choice activity time. It enabled the children to share news telling, however, it was short and focussed, with the main purpose for Jean being the gathering, settling and looking ahead to the next time frame in the program. Diane incorporated a number of mat sessions in her program. For Diane it was a way of legitimising what she was doing. Mat time gave the impression that something of importance was being done. Compared to activity time, it was a tangible element of the working day and therefore easily acknowledged by outsiders. Diane set and maintained her standards and established a behaviour code through mat time.

It is not possible to strictly codify or categorise ritual in a particular form or function. For example, roll call was a particularly notable ritual in Helen's repertoire. It was a low ritual, in that it appeared to have a somewhat low status and to be a routinised set of actions. However, roll call was also a personal ritual for Helen and became more than merely calling a list of names from a register and marking those absent and present. She had a personal set of intentions and the ritual was intended to fulfil this agenda. She also constantly varied the ritual act itself to add interest and an element of surprise for the children. In many ways this simple ritual of roll call lay the groundwork for her over-arching philosophical principle, that of a "caring and sharing community".

For each of the three teachers, a macro-ritual system was evident. In each case, there was a predictable pattern to the yearly program. This formed an overall structure which gave each setting its individual flavour. That is, whilst there was an identifiable rhythm to the year's activities, there were some differences in the events which comprised the macro-system for each setting.

Another common element was the space and setting. The three pre-primary settings looked the same in many respects. The types of materials used were largely similar and the furniture and layout were comparable. At Swanleigh, materials had a different purpose and there were some types of materials not found in the other settings. Also, the overall appearance of the classroom at Swanleigh was more clinical in nature. I had a sense of neatness and precision with order and formality in the organisation which was not as strong in the other pre-primary settings. In spite of these subtle contrasts, I did have the feeling that similar events occurred. In each of the classrooms, the mat area was regarded as a sacred place. When children were called to the mat, there was a change in mood and in the way they conducted themselves. Just as entering a church invokes a particular demeanour so too, did the mat summon particular behaviours.

All teachers incorporated the full range of ritual forms in their teaching, however, that is where the commonality ends. There was no common form of ritual used to convey the same message. For example, in the socialisation of children, the three teachers were concerned with transmitting the social and cultural norms of their classroom and of schooling. The three teachers had developed a learned way of acting, of being in pre-primary, of the values and attitudes important to the children as members of the social group. In conveying these messages each teacher developed a set of micro, personal, and variant rituals specific to their situation and orientations. They created environments and procedures in the form of rituals which reinforced values and which gave their own lives meaning. In each case, the micro-rituals were person-specific and situation-specific, thus resulting in individual teaching styles and practices.

Low, personal rituals such as entering and leaving school, mat time, snack time, story time, and transitions, together with high, institutional rituals such as celebrations and cultural events, were prominent features of the three teachers' practice. At Swanleigh, the degree of importance imposed on the high rituals was somewhat paler and

more indirect, reflecting the purpose such events held for Jean and for the Montessori approach. Both Helen and Diane used high rituals as a means of promoting their program and displaying their strengths. These public performances displayed their product, and at the same time were a way of seeking approval and building their self image through affirmation.

In the final chapter, I share a brief outline of how the teachers came to an understanding of ritual and teaching, and summarise, by looking at the relationship between ritual and pedagogy. Furthermore, I consider some of the differences between the three teachers and their settings.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

Introduction

When I began this study my intention was to better understand the concept of ritual and in particular the role played by ritual within the context of the pre-primary classroom. With a European heritage and a Catholic upbringing, I have been immersed in a life filled with customs, ceremonies and codes of conduct. Rituals have shaped my life experiences and given my life colour and form. At the time of growing up, however, I was not conscious of this process. I was caught up and carried along by it and through immersion in my cultural life I learned the values and ideals held by my family and characterised by my schooling. Now, as I think and talk about ritual I am able to conclude retrospectively that many of the rituals which formed my life were unquestioned, implicit and unconsciously enacted. Needless to say, many of them persist and form part of my own family life today. In our family, we greet each other by kissing on both cheeks, certain dialectal phrases intersperse our daily language and the extended family gathers religiously each Sunday for a meal.

I was not surprised, therefore, when I found that in the early stages of the study the three teachers I worked with did not talk about ritual as being a part of their teaching nor did they recognise their teaching as ritualised. In the early stages, when we deliberated over events after each observation, ritual did not figure in the teacher's

thinking about teaching. I was conscious of the need to let the topic of ritual emerge in conversations and discussions and for the teachers to construct and articulate their own understanding of ritual and the place it held in their teaching. I began by discussing in very general terms the notion of routines and classroom structures. We deliberated on how pre-primary teaching could appear to an outsider to be very uniform and that on the surface there may seem to be very little difference in the way pre-primary classrooms operated. Gradually, we came to the idea of ritual as part of life and more specifically as part of classroom life. At varying points in the study, all three teachers acknowledged that their teaching was routinised, patterned, systematic and highly repetitive.

As the study progressed, I witnessed in the teachers a willingness to open up and discuss their practice. They demonstrated an increased awareness of their teaching and became more reflective and thoughtful about their every day decisions and choices that shaped their work. Gradually, the teachers' meaning of ritual developed and changed. They were more comfortable and articulate in discussing this aspect of their work and came to recognise features of ritual within their practice. For Helen, this was like a sudden revelation. One day, at the beginning of our fifth interview she began the conversation with a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm as she clarified the new meaning she was bringing to her teaching. She explained that rituals were indeed an important part of her work in that they gave her teaching stability and her program continuity.

For Jean, it was a different story. She grappled with the notion of ritual over a number of weeks. We talked at length about ritual in contexts outside teaching and it was during one of these discussions that Jean brought the conversation back to her own classroom situation. She drew comparisons between rituals in general and some of her own teaching techniques and concluded that there were similarities. "These techniques are the cornerstone of what I do, it's the foundation and part of my ritual" (Interview #5,

p1, 30/8/94). Jean identified specific events such as the 'three-period' lesson, the preparation of the classroom and her own role in the classroom as being ritualistic. She attributed these features to the Montessori tradition and hence the basis of her practice.

Diane explained her thinking on ritual in a more straight-forward manner. She equated routine with ritual but justified ritual as being more profound than routine. "There is a belief behind ritual, a reason for doing something," she explained at one interview (Interview #5, p2, 7/9/94) . Diane regarded ritual as a personal aid to her teaching, a way of being organised and of keeping the classroom ticking over smoothly. For Diane, her ritualised practices had been established as a result of expectations set by outside sources; once in place they had become habitual and gave her classroom order.

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Thus over time, through prolonged discussion and reflection the three teachers were better able to explore and articulate their practice. Gradually, they became more aware of ritual and could recognise key forms and features of ritual in their teaching. Each of the participants held distinct views of their practice, including the use of ritual. They recognised that rituals were elaborate systems of recurring patterns which served specific purposes. The three participants were different, yet in many respects there were commonalities in the way they operated and in the forms and function of ritual.

What I found to be common was the way rituals reflected a personal view of, and commitment to, the field of early childhood education and to the welfare of young children. For these three teachers, teaching was a vocation, an enterprise full of purpose and commitment. Each of the teachers held a distinctive set of values and ideals and a particular view about working with young children which were reflected in their ritual performance and which were responsible for each teacher's individual style and method of operation. Each teacher also regarded certain rituals as essential to their teaching and

thereby these carried significant meaning, and were a central component of the program. The differences and similarities resulted in each teacher going about the business of teaching in very different ways.

This study has been limited to three teachers' thoughts and understandings about ritual and teaching. As previously outlined, the three participants were purposefully selected, based on recommendations of effectiveness and commitment to teaching. It was felt that those teachers who were confident about their practice would be more willing to examine their teaching and to share their thoughts. In the time we met, we went from cautious, guarded answering of questions, to a more confident, open sharing of experiences as close relationships developed in each case. As the study progressed I became conscious of the fact that the teachers welcomed the opportunity to explore and talk about their practice. Over time the teachers' concept of ritual became an explicit construct and ritual held a significant place in our discourse about teaching. Being observed over prolonged periods of time was initially daunting for the teachers, however, with time, there was visible evidence of greater ease and relaxation. I was welcomed into the classrooms as an, 'extra pair of hands', and invited to attend extra curricular activities in each of the schools.

The purpose of this study was not to pass judgement on whether situations or systems were good or bad, or effective or ineffective. Nor, was I interested in merely comparing and contrasting the three cases for purposes of determining effectiveness. Rather, my intention was to explore the three teachers' practices and to draw on some similarities and differences in order to study the interplay between ritual and pedagogy. The qualitative approach taken in this study enabled me to spend an extended period of time with each of the three teachers. The participant observations provided opportunities for me to become immersed in the culture of the classrooms, to experience the daily teaching and become familiar with the teachers' long term planning and practices. In

addition, interviews and discussions enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the purposes, intentions and meanings held by each teacher.

Key Findings

The findings of this study can only be reported in terms of the participants in this study. Yet, I contend that many of the understandings about teaching held by these teachers are common with other teachers in the field of pre-primary teaching. My conclusions in the following section are drawn from the cases reported in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 and the more analytical material in Chapter 9. Firstly, I discuss six key features of ritual as it is enacted in pre-primary settings, then I comment on the interplay between ritual and pedagogy and draw some implications for teacher education. Finally, I make some concluding comments.

Pre-primary classrooms are highly ritualised

What is particularly notable in this study is that the three pre-primary classroom settings are rich sources of highly ritualised practices. For the three teachers in this study a significant proportion of their daily activities are carefully planned and scripted codes of behaviour. These behaviours are largely characterised by, repetitive, symbolic and highly valued patterns of action put in place over a significant length of time. Whilst there are similarities in the way the teachers operate and in the forms and functions of ritual, there are also significant differences. Ritual becomes a strategy, a means by which important messages concerning classroom norms, values and ways of operating are transmitted. For example, Helen used her rituals of mat time and roll call to bring students together in order to establish a community centred on the values of sharing and caring. Conversely, Diane used her ritual of mat time to establish rules and procedures for appropriate

behaviour, thus perpetuating her values of order and control. Whilst Jean used the ritual of using materials to maintain the ethos and culture of Montessori. Thus rituals played a key role in the curriculum. They were a way of developing and codifying the teachers' beliefs, ideology and pedagogical knowledge.

The three settings demonstrate an overt portrayal of rituals according to long standing personal philosophical traditions. The rituals are symbolic of a particular pedagogical approach for the teachers and in addition help to define the individual culture of classrooms. Hence, through ritual teachers communicate an individualised and sophisticated knowledge base, embedded in deep beliefs about theories of early childhood teaching and learning.

Rituals are taken for granted

Generally, teachers have clear goals, intentions, values and beliefs which guide their practice and which enable them to go about their daily work in a routinised and stable fashion. In order to meet certain expectations particular plans of action are put in place and many persist over an extended period of time. The rituals which form a significant part of classroom action are largely invariant. That is, they remain relatively stable over long periods of time and the messages carried become the very essence of people's lives and as such operate at a habitual level. The macro and micro systems of rituals provide structure, predictability and stability which in turn provide continuity and enable teachers and students to go routinely about their business. Thus, once set in place rituals can be taken for granted.

Whilst the teachers in this study were not conscious of making or developing rituals per se, nor were they initially cognisant of the connection between ritual and

teaching, there was significant evidence of various forms of ritual which appeared automatic and habitual. When asked, the teachers were able to give explicit explanations of the intentions and meaning of certain ritualised actions. This suggests that at some stage the teachers held specific goals and intentions which were systematically translated into pedagogical action. This action, therefore, carries an intellectualised purpose which when repeated over time becomes largely uncontested and unquestioned and may give the impression of mindless unspecified activity. For example, Helen's ritual of theme work had been in operation for as long as twenty years, and had become her personal trademark. On the surface this could be regarded as unthinking and habitual. However, she consciously adhered to this particular structure as long as it fulfilled certain educational goals which she considered important. Jean preserved the behaviour and work codes of Montessori education through carefully maintained rituals in order to sustain a specific cultural and educational system. In Diane's case, there was a clear agenda with regard to preparing children for formal schooling and to this end her daily regime reflected certain norms and rarely altered. Hence, for each teacher there were certain invariant rituals which once set in place appeared mindless and accepted but, which in reality conveyed a deeper meaning related to personal objectives and were a means of codifying pedagogical knowledge and systematically translating intentions.

Just as invariant practices have the capacity to provide security and stability for teachers, there is a danger that invariant practices which are taken for granted may become a way of simply filling in the day, rather than the basis of reflection on practice. The risk lies in the possibility that messages conveyed by rituals may lose their impact as participants become immersed in the rite and are carried along by its repetitive nature. In these circumstances, ritual may become a habit, a liability and a barrier to innovation and impede pedagogical change. This is a criticism which is often directed at the ritualisation of the Montessori system of education (Beyer, 1966; Knudsen-Lindauer, 1987, Simons & Simons 1986). At Swanleigh, however, Jean had compensated for this dilemma

through her personalised approach to Montessori education which she attributed to her own interpretation of the Montessori philosophy and belief system. Nevertheless, in all three settings there was evidence of complacent acceptance of long standing traditional practices which had endured virtually unchallenged for many years. Helen persisted with her framework of theme work for almost twenty years; Diane deliberately followed her daily regime and was contained within the ritual scope as a means of justifying the quality of her practice, Jean conscientiously maintained those aspects of her program which gave her work-place its particular culture and orientation.

Some rituals are sacrosanct

Rituals transmit ideologies of teachers' beliefs, which are sacrosanct and revered and which gives pre-primary settings their distinctive features. Teachers hold certain rituals as sacred and during my observations over a two year period I came to recognise those which were valued and protected. The teachers were quick to defend certain sets of actions and readily admitted to me that there were parts of their teaching they would not change or omit. For Helen, theme work was sacrosanct and had endured over time and despite pressure from more recent curriculum innovations. At Swanleigh, Jean was largely led by paradigms pertaining to traditional views of the Montessori approach and therefore the three period lesson, and the ritual of 'doing the job' were held as sacred. Likewise for Diane mat time was sacrosanct as it provided her with a context for imparting particular behaviours, values and norms, as well as a forum for displaying her personal talent for teaching. Through particular rituals, the teachers developed personal systems appropriate for their own needs and intentions and for their individual classroom communities.

Thus certain ritual forms represent the very essence of life in the classroom and through various ritualised pedagogical encounters children act, work and behave in ways which are important to the teacher and representative of the education system. Through this process, rituals such as mat time, fruit time and story time, albeit individualised and adapted at a micro-level, have come to represent sacrosanct practices which are symbolic of pre-primary education and represent the distinctive features by which pre-primary education is known and recognised.

When rituals are varied, the variations occur within the basic ritual structure. For example, when Diane varied the way she moved children for music, she worked within the confines of the broad ritual of lining children up, issuing instructions and moving to an orderly pattern. Helen varied roll call, but only within the boundaries of her routinised procedure and Jean injected a personal dimension which acknowledged what which she valued as worthwhile practice. The variant (micro, low and personal) rituals enable teachers to individualise and accommodate the performance to meet specific objectives and outcomes and to suit differing audiences. When rituals are created and set in place, the teachers make a personal commitment to them and in this way, ritualised actions become highly valued and significant for the participants to the extent that they are loathed to give them up. Rituals draw together the teachers' objectives and intentions and therefore enable them to systematically plan and orchestrate life in the classroom.

Ritual can act as a framework

Ritual provides a framework for teachers, whereby, drawing together disparate learning objectives and presenting them in the form of a performance which invites participation and engagement on the part of the children. The performance, planned, managed and enacted by the teacher serves as a tool for the transmission of a store of

knowledge both overt and covert. On an overt level, is the technical knowledge of the performance itself, knowing how to act and participate. On the covert or tacit level is the intellectual knowledge, including values, norms, socialisation processes, personal views, classroom purposes, attitudes and forms of communication. For example, on the surface Helen's ritual of roll call had the appearance of a repetitive act of calling names of attendants, yet covertly the ritual provided her with an experience for building a sense of community and the social and emotional climate of her centre. Hence the ritual acted as a framework which enabled Helen to put in place that which was pedagogically possible and desirable and to convey specific orientations which were in keeping with her individual system of beliefs and attitudes.

Through participation in specific rituals teachers are educating children in the cultural life of the classroom and school. In Swanleigh this was apparent where the environment, space and curriculum conformed to the historical, ordered and prescribed pattern of an alternative approach in education. At Radford, Helen used ritual to organise her classroom in order to provide an environment both physical and emotional which would ensure a smooth transition into her school community. Whilst for Diane, rituals acted as a structure for manipulating behaviours in order to produce conformity and control.

Ritual is an expression of values and beliefs

The three teachers revealed an individualised and sophisticated knowledge base embedded in deep beliefs and theories of early childhood teaching and learning. Their practice reflected a wealth of implicit practical knowledge built up over years of working with young children and had the semblance of effortless organisation and routine. Internalised frameworks of knowledge had been constructed and reconstructed by the

teachers through an integration of learned theoretical perspectives, personal experiences, practical craft knowledge and interaction with others. Over the years, the traditional regimes of truth pertaining to early childhood education, which Foucault describes as "the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true and the means by which it is sanctioned" (Gordon, 1980, p. 131), were modified and transformed into personal systems of beliefs and management that steered the individuals towards certain actions and ways of thinking. This set of 'truths' represented the sacred stories (characterised by Clandinin & Connelly 1995, and noted in the literature on religious ritual by Harris, 1992; Jennings, 1982 and Tremmel, 1976) of early childhood education, handed down, taken up, institutionalised and transmitted through traditional practice. It was this personal system of beliefs and values which shaped the form, process and content of rituals set in place and consequently shaped the teachers' pedagogy and was responsible for the personal dimension of each of the classrooms.

Helen, Jean and Diane had constructed their own knowledge and understanding of teaching through both interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences which led them to form their own particular views about early childhood pedagogy. For example, Helen had established a successful formula based on personal experience which she conscientiously complied with and which formed the foundation for her actions. Her commitment to imparting a body of content reflected her view of 'knowledge' and it's importance in her program. Whilst Montessori was highly structured with prescribed curriculum, pedagogy, methods and materials, Jean managed to bring her own personal biases, values and intentions into play. Within these constraints, personal interpretation on what was best for Jean and the children was exercised. Diane had found a 'comfort zone' in her teaching, secure in the knowledge that she was meeting the external expectations placed upon her. Thus her personal preferences were reflected in choice of curriculum and decisions about pedagogy. The teachers worked within a pedagogical format and the ritualised actions became a justification and enactment of a particular

instructional form and teaching procedure and a reflection of their personal beliefs and ideology and these varied for each of the three teachers.

Rituals are didactic

Within the discipline of theology, ritual has been described as both "a dramatic portrayal of the 'truths' of religion" (Tremmel, 1976, p. 114) and as performing intellectual functions (Jennings, 1982). As such, ritual is not a senseless activity but is one of many ways in which human beings construe and construct their world. Jennings characterises three functions of ritual which can easily be translated to classroom life. Firstly, ritual action is a way of gaining knowledge. For the participants, this is a learning or understanding of the action and word. Ritual will only make sense if it is experienced within a context. Secondly, ritual serves to transmit knowledge. Ritual action transmits the knowing gained through ritual action itself. This is the teaching mode of ritual. Thirdly, ritual performance is a public display of the truths or belief system carried by the ritual itself and of the participants. Thus an observer can see, approve, understand or recognise the ritual action. For example, attending a football game is a public display of values and demands pertaining to a particular community, the team. Participants acknowledge and affirm their allegiance through systems of communication and ritual actions which transmit messages of mateship and membership. Belonging to the 'club' takes on a public display, through barracking, jeering and through the wearing of paraphernalia.

Rituals in pre-primary settings become a way for teachers to put in place that, which is both pedagogically possible and desirable and which imparts knowledge to meet certain goals and ends. Hence, rituals take on didactic qualities in that the ritual itself becomes a pedagogical action and the messages transmitted through the action are

expressions of personal knowledge, passed on to the participants. The ritual enactment becomes a pedagogical strategy, a particular style and strategy of teaching, established by the teacher and enacted over time in a regular sequence and configuration. The personal practical knowledge that teachers bring to the enactment, shape the form and function of the rituals set in place. The rituals reflect individualisation and autonomy in decisions about curriculum content, objectives, structure and methods of teaching. In this study, the three teachers varied significantly in the way they went about their work and rituals were responsible for the transmission and internalisation of a particular social order and moral community within each classroom. In this way, rituals served a different pedagogical purpose for each of the three teachers. They represented different forms of pedagogy and conveyed deep symbolic meaning related to what schooling was about in each of the centres.

Knowledge learned in ritual action provides a model for action in contexts outside the ritual, and so too classroom ritual became a model for transferring ways of acting to new situations without the need for explicit teaching. For the three teachers in this study, the ritual performance of mat time modelled the activity of coming together as a group, acting and behaving in a certain way, and of knowing and anticipating the kinds of experiences which would occur. Participation in the ritual not only generated knowledge of the ritual action itself but also knowledge of classroom norms and implicit rules set in place, and participants were educated in the cultural life of the school; the social customs, plans, and symbolic forms. Consequently, the formula became a blueprint for knowing how to act and participants were able to transfer the knowledge gained to new settings and circumstances. As a result, ritual shaped pedagogy and became a pedagogical strategy for the teachers.

Ritual and Teaching

Teaching is a complex activity grounded in person-specific contexts and stituations (Yinger 1979). One way of reducing the number of ad hoc decisions confronting teachers on a daily basis is by ritualising certain operating procedures. Thus, ritual attaches predictability to classroom procedures and security and dependability for the children. Once set in place ritual becomes a process by which teachers orchestrate daily life in the classroom and assign meaning to actions and event. The familiar allows teachers and students to go routinely about their business. When basic structures are established they act to free up the teacher to pursue more important tasks. Consequently, the familiar provides a rubric within which more meaningful activities can occur, in much the same way as a wedding ceremony possesses a basic structure within which there is flexibility for the manipulation of variations to the service according to personal beliefs and preferences of the participants.

Throughout the period of participant observations I was conscious of the fact that the three teachers adhered to a remarkably stable sequence of classroom practices. To a large degree, many of the activities which made up the daily repertoire were ritualised and rarely modified. It is these practices which appear traditional and typical and which give a sense of sameness to many of the pre-primary settings I have visited over the years in my role as early childhood teacher educator. Teachers establish elaborate macro-systems which remain largely consistent over time. However, within the low, personal, micro systems variations do occur, and so notable differences exist in teachers' individual style of teaching; their personal preferences and mode of operation.

When teachers do vary the ritual framework they act to engage the participants in new ways and therefore maximise teaching and learning opportunities through a renewal of involvement and participation. Also, when variations occur teachers are taking a more

active role in the teaching process. They become more cognitively engaged in making decisions about content, process and intentions and the outcome is greater deliberation, thoughtfulness and creativity in their practice. Rather than operating on an automatic level and being constrained by the invariant ritual, teachers can be inspired to work within and around the ritual and the ritual acts as an impetus for new pedagogical strategies. In this way variation is not random, but planned and deliberate and is led by persistent and careful consideration of practice in the light of personal knowledge and beliefs, as the teacher acts to manipulate the ritual rather than to be manipulated by it.

According to most text books on early childhood education, teachers should provide a secure and supportive physical, emotional and social environment for young children. This is usually accomplished through building a strong sense of community. An important implicit function of ritual in each of the three classrooms in this study was the development of this sense of community. Just as religious rituals are performed by communities of persons for the purpose of collective acknowledgment of the sacred and for community benefits expected from the sacred (Tremmel, 1976), so too rituals in pre-primary are performed by the inhabitants of the classroom and used by teachers to build a community spirit. Through ritual the class members are brought together and have a shared way of doing and knowing. The rituals become a vehicle for involvement and participation in which participants become caught up in the life and spirit of the event thereby moulding a sense of community. In this way rituals transmit acceptable dispositions and demeanours which are linked to goals and intentions valued by the teacher. They build a particular classroom ethos and climate, a kind of bonding between celebrant and participants, with a sense of 'groupness' brought about through a sharing of beliefs and events.

It was evident that each of the teachers held different concepts of the notion of community and these were perpetuated through established rituals. Helen had a

commitment to fostering a community culture which supported her views and fulfilled her objectives. At Swanleigh, Jean constructed a home community as advocated by Montessori, along with principles of independence and individuality within a task oriented society. For Diane community meant maintaining order and discipline and developing shared codes of behaviour.

Rituals not only sustain teachers' orientation to a particular view of society, culture and education but as Henry (1992) found, also sustain individuals emotionally and morally. Established rituals convey implicit values, reinforce personal ideals, contribute to personal well-being and self satisfaction and provide the participants with a sense of security and assurance. All three teachers felt morally obligated to promote the welfare of their children and as such were responsible to parents and in the case of Radford and Connor, to the state education system. Rituals, therefore, became a way of transmitting and sustaining features of teaching which were morally approved by the teachers.

Implications for Teacher Education

Whilst a child development perspective has traditionally underpinned pedagogy in early childhood programs in Western Australia, this view has recently been challenged as a result of more recent theories regarding how children think and learn, what should be learned, and more importantly how it should be taught (Fleer, 1996; Cullen, 1994). This recent work raises issues for deliberation regarding the role of the teacher and of appropriate pedagogy which takes into account the cognitive, social and cultural needs of the children. This requires a more flexible approach from the teacher, in both rethinking traditional actions and in developing new actions which take into account contemporary needs. Therefore, for change to occur in practice, teachers need to engage in what Schon (1987) describes as systematic 'reflection on action' and this includes reflecting on the

role and use of ritual in teaching. The first step is to recognise ritual as part of the rubric of teaching and to attend to it in teacher education programs as part of raising teachers' conscious awareness of the degree to which ritual is embedded in practice.

What has been clear in this study is that ritual is implicit in teachers' practice. If rituals are to be generative, rather than controlling, then teachers need to be made aware of both the explicit and implicit roles, functions and purposes of ritual and in particular, how varying ritual has the potential to inspire teachers to transform long standing patterns of action. Without variation there is a danger that the ritual may become automatic and unresponsive to the participants needs and over time may restrict the teacher, if left unquestioned. Educational change, be it on a macro (system) or micro (classroom) level, is more likely to occur if teachers engage in self evaluation and reflection on practice; adopt a shared discourse about teaching; and consciously and actively think through, plan and use ritual to achieve certain goals and to improve the quality of classroom practice.

If ritual does indeed have didactic potential then it seems reasonable to suggest that teacher educators should consider ways of making ritual, its forms and functions, more explicit in teacher education programs. Given that teachers use well rehearsed situation-specific rituals which become automatic with experience, there is a need to determine the extent to which teachers are taught to use ritual and what ritualised forms are being taught to them.

Pre-primary teaching is highly ritualised, however, this aspect of teaching has been found to be understated in the early childhood literature. A survey of four key text books (Day, 1994; Seefeldt & Barbour, 1990; Eliason & Jenkins, 1994; Beaty, 1996) commonly used in early childhood teacher education has revealed no reference to ritual as a dimension of pedagogy. Whilst considerable content is devoted to the notion of routines in pre-primary and equivalent settings, nowhere, is the concept of ritual explicitly

explored as a phenomena of classroom life. This in itself is indicative of the fact that the concept of ritual has not been fully explored in relation to its value in early childhood education. Understanding the potential and value of ritual in maximising teaching and learning opportunities can be helpful is shaping knowledge of teaching and this understanding needs to begin at the teacher training stage.

Pre-primary teachers in the large school system of education can be very insular in their work. In many cases pre-primary teachers are principally concerned with their own particular classroom. Contact with administration and school personnel can be minimal (although this concern is at the forefront of early childhood reform in Western Australia, change in educational policy and practice is a slow process). It is common for pre-primary teachers to be isolated from the remainder of the school staff in their location, in relation to the main school building and in differences in daily scheduling. In addition the sense of separation may be accentuated by the 'particular' rituals of pre-primary teaching which act to contribute to a distinctive culture of pre-primary teaching

Opportunities which encourage pre-primary teachers to continue to maintain contact with like-minded professionals and which promote the engagement of pre-primary teachers in collaborative, practical activity as a means of reviewing and refocussing on curriculum and teaching must be fostered. Professional development of teachers should adopt an approach which questions and revisits goals, beliefs and practices in order to continually reconstruct the role of the early childhood educator and for teachers to purposefully reflect on and evaluate their motives.

Another consideration is the degree of flexibility in the curriculum. Pressures regarding accountability, and working within a framework of student outcome statements may lead teachers to become constrained by certain practices which eventually become unquestioned, repetitive and unthinking. As I draw towards the close of this study, I

find myself reflecting on a visit I made in January 1992 to a pre-school in Reggio Emilia, a city in the north of Italy. It was both an enlightening and thought provoking experience and whilst it was a relatively short first-hand encounter my impressions, combined with further reading, have provoked much thought and discussion. At the 'Diana' school, children were the centre of the curriculum. They were given the freedom to follow their own interests, to construct their own knowledge, discover and learn at their own pace and to take the lead in the development of the curriculum. What was most evident was the power of the children to drive the learning agenda.

The practices of Reggio Emilia conveyed many significant cultural and social messages which in many respects underpinned their educational approach. A macro system of rituals, those which could be categorised as invariant, high and institutional was clearly evident. The Reggio approach was operating on a basis of deeply held traditional and cultural values and these were explicitly portrayed through key daily events. However, at the micro-level the teachers operated in a highly unstructured, spontaneous and personal manner. There was considerably more freedom within the curriculum than is typical in Australian schools. The curriculum and pedagogy allowed for variation, personalisation and spontaneity on the part of the teacher and in this way more appropriately served the interests and creativity of the children. The teachers at Reggio Emilia worked within and around a ritual structure with considerably more flexibility and spontaneity than is evident in Western Australian pre-schools.

Summary and Conclusion

Just as this study attempts to answer some of the questions related to how rituals are used in pre-primary classrooms from the point of view of the celebrant (teacher), many other questions arise which warrant further investigation but which cannot be

addressed within the scope of this study. For example, does intellectual exploration occur for participants (children) within the ritual activity? What kinds of variations maximise learning opportunities for the participants? Whilst it seems that ritual competency of children corresponds to the acquisition of social, communication skills, behaviour patterns, values, attitudes and work habits, further study is needed to investigate the impact of rituals on the participants, more specifically, the cognitive impact of rituals on the children as participants in the ritual performance. It may be of value therefore, to further explore whether the ritual activities used by pre-primary teachers allow children space for creative learning.

In this study ritual has been used as a lens through which to examine and understand the pedagogy and practices of three pre-primary teachers. It has explored the ways three teachers used ritual in pre-primary classroom settings. The findings of this study suggest that rituals pervade classroom life and that certain rituals are deemed sacrosanct by teachers and consequently become key pedagogical procedures whereby intentions and goals are fulfilled.

This study has found that:

- Ritual serves as a tool for teachers in order to simplify the many demands of classroom teaching:
- Classroom ritual provides a latent structure for the teacher that goes beyond surface meaning and carries a rational, intellectualised pedagogical purpose for the participants:
- An interplay exists between ritual and pedagogy; that is, teachers move from the overt to the implicit meaning, from the set of actions to the messages transmitted:
- Teachers work within a pedagogical format and the ritual becomes the justification of a particular philosophy and style of teaching:
- The role of ritual in the three pre-primary classrooms studied went beyond the realm of conveying messages of conformity, consensus and cohesiveness, and was a means of

putting in place a particular instructional form and teaching procedure for each of the three teachers:

- Rituals were an embodiment of certain truths about early childhood education, and existed in the everyday life of the pre-primary classroom and were responsible for teaching content, as well as values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours:
- Rituals held different purposes and meaning for different teachers, and different rituals were valued by teachers to the extent that certain rituals were sacrosanct thereby reflecting commitment to particular teaching forms and procedures:
- Rituals with high levels of variance provided teachers with a flexible framework and therefore these rituals became ways of personalising their pedagogy:
- Variations in ritual were indicative of a teacher's willingness to adapt to changing circumstances, and of the degree of creativity, sponteneity and responsiveness to the needs of the participants (children):
- Invariant rituals provided a stable framework within which messages of certainty, predictability and conformity were communicated:
- Ritual performance became an expression of culture, values, attitudes and knowledge and in turn were influenced by the teachers' personal intentions, views on schooling, and their personal practical knowledge.

In telling their stories, the three teachers in this study were able to share the specialised knowledge of what pre-primary teachers know and do, which is normally embedded in their actions. This study has highlighted the value of ritual in early childhood education and its potential to act as a tool through which teachers structure a particular form of praxis. In spite of the remarkably stable sequence of activities evident in traditional pre-primary classrooms and the sense of commonality between classrooms, this investigation has also uncovered significant differences in the way classrooms operate. In-depth investigation of classroom action indicated that ritualised pedagogy

serves an educative purpose and is responsible for both propagating sameness and at a deeper level, personalising practice.

A related aspect of this work is the realisation that ritual may become controlling. For some teachers ritual may become a kind of restraint. Teachers can become captives of ritual, in that the ritual becomes manipulative and does not allow for inspiration or change. In this way, ritual may apply a kind of brake to teaching, just as belief systems may limit what teachers do unless they are mindful of innovation, creativity and the need for change. On the other hand ritual has the power to inspire. They are value laden patterns of action, packed with symbolic meaning and messages. In cultural terms, ritual and ceremonies have been responsible for passing on major philosophies and sociological paradigms from one generation to another, and this same proposition can easily be translated to classroom culture. A dilemma for a teacher may be the extent to which there is a balance between the invariant and variant ritual; the repetitive, safe, routinised action, as opposed to the generative nature of ritual brought about through spontaneity, creativity and response to fancies and innovations.

It is hoped that describing and interpreting various forms of rituals of teaching in pre-primary settings may be useful in understanding the role played by ritual in structuring teaching in these settings. The extended field work and weekly converstations I had with the three teachers in this study revealed the personal dimensions of their teaching. As a result of reflective probing of beliefs and practices, new ways of thinking and of interpreting situations emerged for each of them. Understanding ritual is a way of coming to know how each teacher expresses herself, her personal beliefs and goals and what teaching is about. To this end, I have given Helen the last word. During one of our weekly converstions she expressed to me her newly formed thoughts about her work in a way I could hope to not emulate. In Helen's words:

Carmel, I need rituals for my teaching. I really do, and I rely on those rituals for my teaching and I can use them as a tool. I establish many rituals at the begining of the year, and they become a very important part of my teaching.... I've got oodles. An important part is the continuity. They give the children a continuous pattern to their everyday life. I find these children love to be able to predict, they know what is going to happen and I think a great deal that way myself. But knowing that there is a sense of security and that there is a boundary and children feel comfortable, secure and confident... so continuity and predictability are important for me and the children. I need to know where I am going, but at the same time I like to refine and change things, so there is always an interest there. I want children to have self respect and self esteem, so the variation this year is the Star Person. Rituals set a framework for my teaching, they structure my day's work and I can build around them. But I need them, I really do (Interview #5, p1-2, 29/8/94).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Ethics Consent Form

To participants in the study of RITUAL AND PEDAGOGY: TEACHERS' USE RITUAL IN PRE-PRIMARY CLASSROOM SETTINGS.

I, Carmel Maloney, am undertaking doctoral studies at Edith Cowan University and will be conducting a research project in order to fulfil the requirements of the degree.

The study aims to investigate the role of ritual in pre-primary classroom settings and the extent to which rituals hold a pedagogical purpose for the participants. The project will contribute to the field of Early Childhood Education in that it will examine classroom practice in order to understand what teachers value, know and do. An understanding of the pedagogy, curriculum and practices underlying early childhood education will continue to inform the preparation of early childhood educators and move research efforts towards shaping the nature of the knowledge base of early childhood education in Australia.

I am inviting you to participate in the study because you meet the criteria set out for selection of appropriate case study participants. You have been purposefully selected and recommended to me based on your reputation of being effective early childhood educators and for the commitment you demonstrate and your willingness to discuss your classroom work.

I will be conducting three case studies with participant observations in the three sites over approximately a school year. Prospective teachers will be asked to participate in interviews about their teaching which will be tape recorded and transcribed. In the later stages of data collection, selected classroom events will be video taped to be used as a further stimulus for discussion between myself and the teacher.

In all cases confidentiality of information will be respected. Participants will be given pseudonyms and no person in the study will be identified by name in any report unless explicit permission as been given by that person.

It is expected that participants in the study will find the project a stimulating experience with discussions, interviews and reflections contributing to professional interest and development.

Any questions concerning the study can be directed to Ms Carmel Maloney, Department of Early Childhood Studies, Edith Cowan University, Churchlands Campus (phone: 273 8463).

Agreement to Participate

I_____ (participant) have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study, realising I may withdraw at any time should I choose to do so. I agree that the research data gathered in this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

_____

Participant

_____

Investigator

APPENDIX 2

Field Records

Radford Pre-primary

No	Date	Record
1	26 July 1994	Participant observation
2	1 August 1994	Participant observation
3	8 August 1994	Participant observation
4	15 August 1994	Participant observation
5	22 August 1994	Participant observation
6	29 August 1994	Participant observation
7	5 September 1994	Participant observation
8	11 September 1994	Participant observation
9	19 September 1994	Participant observation
	School Holidays	
10	17 October 1994	Participant observation
11	22 October 1994	Participant observation
12	31 October 1994	Participant observation
13	7 November 1994	Participant observation
14	14 November 1994	Participant observation
15	21 November 1994	Video recording
	End of School Year	
16	2 February 1995	Participant observation
17	10 February 1995	Participant observation
18	14 February 1995	Participant observation
19	21 February 1995	Participant observation
20	28 February 1995	Participant observation
22	14 March 1995	Participant observation
23	1 August 1995	Participant observation
24	7 August 1995	Participant observation
1	4 August 1994	Interview
2	7 August 1994	Interview
3	15 August 1994	Interview
4	22 August 1994	Interview
5	29 August 1994	Interview
6	5 September 1994	Interview
7	24 September 1994	Interview
8	24 October 1994	Interview
8	14 February 1995	Interview
9	1 March 1995	Interview
10	15 March 1995	Interview

Swanleigh Montessori School

No	Date	Record
1	26 July 1994	Participant observation
2	2 August 1994	Participant observation
3	9 August 1994	Participant observation
4	16 August 1994	Participant observation
5	23 August 1994	Participant observation
6	30 August 1994	Participant observation
7	6 September 1994	Participant observation
8	20 September 1994	Participant observation
	School Holidays	
9	18 October 1994	Participant observation
10	25 October 1994	Participant observation
11	1 November 1994	Participant observation
12	8 November 1994	Participant observation
13	22 November 1994	Video recording
	End of School Year	
14	9 February 1995	Participant observation
15	15 February 1995	Participant observation
16	22 February 1995	Participant observation
17	15 March 1995	Participant observation
18	17 August 1995	Participant observation
19	24 August 1995	Participant observation

1	2 August 1994	Interview
2	9 August 1994	Interview
3	16 August 1994	Interview
4	23 August 1994	Interview
5	30 August 1994	Interview
6	25 October 1994	Interview
7	8 November 1994	Interview
8	15 February 1995	Interview
9	16 March 1995	Interview

Connor Pre-primary

No	Date	Record
1	10 August 1994	Participant observation
2	17 August 1994	Participant observation
3	24 August 1994	Participant observation
4	31 August 1994	Participant observation
5	7 September 1994	Participant observation
	School Holidays	
6	19 October 1994	Participant observation
7	26 October 1994	Participant observation
8	1 November 1994	Participant observation
9	9 November 1994	Participant observation
10	23 November 1994	Video recording
11	1 December 1994	Participant observation
	End of School Year	
12	1 February 1995	Participant observation
13	8 February 1995	Participant observation
14	14 February 1995	Participant observation
15	21 February 1995	Participant observation
16	28 February 1995	Participant observation
17	16 August 1995	Participant observation
18	23 August 1995	Participant observation

1	10 August 1994	Interview
2	17 August 1994	Interview
3	24 August 1994	Interview
4	31 August 1994	Interview
5	5 September 1994	Interview
6	19 October 1994	Interview
7	26 October 1994	Interview
8	1 November 1994	Interview
9	14 February 1995	Interview
10	21 February 1995	Interview
11	16 August 1995	Interview

APPENDIX 3

Sample Field Note Entry

2 August 1994

8.45 The children are arriving. As they get to the door they are greeted one by one by Jean. She makes an individual comment to as many children as possible. "Hello Jessica, how are you today. What lovely yellow socks, they match your yellow bow. I have green on today, can you see where I have green on"? Jessica points to Jean's jumper. "Yes my jumper is green and where else? Jessica, "socks". "Yes and my eyes are green too" adds Jean. The parents rarely proceed past the door and today is no exception. Once again the children very easily/happily say their goodbyes, leave their parents and move into the classroom and quickly become engrossed in an activity. "I haven't got a job" (Sylvia). "would you like me to find you one" (aide). A puzzle is taken from the shelf and placed on a table for Sylvia. She quickly takes to the task of putting the pieces back together. It is a difficult puzzle of a butterfly, with many colours and pieces of similar appearance. Sylvia perseveres and finally completes the puzzle. Once finished she moves to the centre table and rings the bell to call the teacher to look at her work. Several children gather each with their hands behind their backs, and admire her work.

The children are left to their own devices quite a lot. They are not hurried to take a job, they are encouraged if seen to be wandering aimlessly. "Here you are Julie, have a practice" The teacher points to the lacing frame. Julie has

been standing watching another children for some time. She sits and gets on with the lacing.

9.20 Quite a group have gathered in the kitchen area this morning, pouring, weighing, buttering bread (6 children). Mia (3 yr old) is asked is she wants to do a letter for her scrap book. The teacher sits with her as she guides her through the lesson. "You can choose two letters today". Mia takes 'l' and 'i' as her letters. The teacher asks her what sound the letters make. Mia responds correctly, and the teacher asks her to feel the shape of the letters. She is then left to trace over the letter shape with a crayon, to produce a rubbing of the letter in her scrap book. The teacher attends to Mitchell in the kitchen who is pouring rice from one container to another, while Mia completes her task. When finished she waits patiently for the teacher to return. "What does this say?" asks the teacher. 'I' responds Mia. Can you think of anything that starts with 'i' .....like insect" continues the teacher. "Do you want to draw and insect or will I?" asks the teacher. "You, I can't draw insects" says Mia. 'OK do you want to colour it in? You carry on and I'll put these away for you (letter cards).

10.00 Alex is sent to the thinking chair for being rude. 5 children sit at the tables and work at individual activities, sorting objects, painting with pop-sticks, lock and key matching, threading beads, and puzzles. They are thoroughly engrossed. There is not a great deal of interaction happening, no talking amongst the group. The object sorting in completed and Alison puts everything back into the central container and begins again. This time she 'plays' with the toys rather than sorting/categorising them. Two boys are wandering around and Jean suggests they do a job together while they wait for the finger painting activity. The children take a great deal of responsibility for their own work, clearing away, cleaning up, washing brushes and placemat. This seems to be a very important feature of this classroom.

10.15 There are 3 children left at the table. Still very little interaction verbally, but very engrossed in their work. When Natasha finishes her job she leans over to help her neighbour, however the aide is close by and makes eye contact with Natasha. She immediately stops and when Sally puts her job back on the shelf Natasha quickly goes and gets it for herself.

Michael is directed away from the carpet sweeper to a peg board activity. Jean shows hem how to take the pegs out, and tells him he must put them back. The teacher leaves and Michael quickly finishes the activity and call out "Here its done". The teacher returns, checks the work, and gives him another, which is more difficult.